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RETHINKING ASSIMILATION THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSNATIONAL
MIGRATION:

Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bo Yong Lee

November 2011

Advisor: Dr. Antony Alumkal

Author: Bo Yong Lee

Title: RETHINKING ASSIMILATION THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSNATIONAL
MIGRATION: *Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants*

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Abstract

Given the changing global environment and different experiences of the new immigrants, it is necessary to delve into the question of how the notions and patterns of immigration and assimilation change through the lens of transnational migration that focuses on the connection of immigrants to the context of both sending and receiving countries. Recognizing the transnational religious activities and creative adaptations of the new immigrants to new environments can enrich the study of assimilation, which reflects the changing picture of multilayered American society and its constituents. To examine the assimilation process of Korean immigrants through their transnational religious activities, my research examines both organizations and individuals seeking long-distance spiritual and practical guidance to negotiate identities in a new land and find meaning to their lives. Rather than assuming the inevitable process of assimilation, this study of Korean immigrants' assimilation under the influence of transnational engagements can provide a changing understanding of assimilation, which emphasizes dynamic and reciprocal adaptations between immigrants and both sending and receiving societies.

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I. Introduction

1. The Scope of the Dissertation and Thesis

In recent studies of immigration, transnational migration is one of the primary research topics as more migrants develop strong ties to more than one country, blurring the boundaries of social and geographical spaces. As Alejandro Portes et al. indicates, even though “back-and-forth movements by immigrants have always existed, they have not acquired until recently the critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field.”¹ Along with the rapid development of transportation, information technology, and various global networks, the growth of transnational activities has started to draw attention from the public and academia.

Considering transnational ties of immigrants in contemporary American society, important questions can be posed in relation to issues of assimilation. Are assimilation and transnational engagements a zero-sum game? In what ways and to what extent do transnational activities affect the changing patterns and degrees of assimilation of immigrants? A conventional view of assimilation suggests that transnational activities impede the process of assimilation, which anticipates the full incorporation of immigrants to the American mainstream. Yet, the relationship between transnationalism and

¹ Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, “The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999): 217.

assimilation requires broader and deeper studies in relation to the experiences of the new immigrants. As José Casanova argues, “the traditional model of assimilation, turning European nationals into American ‘ethnics,’ can no longer serve as a model of assimilation.”² For the new immigrants, who mainly consist of non-Europeans, the classical meaning of assimilation provides a very limited application. Because of the different physical appearances of the new immigrants, they have been confronted with the grave prejudice of the host society as unassimilable, and, thus, rarely felt that they would be fully admitted to the American mainstream society. In addition, given the process of globalization and the unprecedented level of access to original nations and traditions, it is timely and significant to investigate how the new immigrants assimilate into American society connected with transnational activities.

Until recently, while most transnational migration studies focused on economic, political, and socio-cultural factors, scholars rarely provided a sufficient account of the reality of religion in transnational activities and its relation to the process of assimilation of immigrants in American society. Unlike sociopolitical and economic dimensions of transnationalism, however, religious activities are significant to illuminate more internal and profound aspects of assimilation of newcomers in terms of the negotiation of identity in a new nation, search for belonging, and the establishment of moral values. Yet, due to the relative novelty of stable and regular transnational connections, religious studies on new immigrant groups have produced limited research in this phenomenon. This can also be applied to religious studies on Korean immigrants and their congregations. Even

² José Casanova, “What Is a Public Religion?,” in *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Polity in America*, eds. Hugh Heclo and Wilfred McClay (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), 30.

though there have been many studies of Korean American religious beliefs and practices, very few studies have been done on the transnational religious connection of Korean immigrants and its relation to assimilation.

In order to advance religious studies on Korean immigrants and their congregations, my research will explore how Korean immigrants access religious resources through transnational networks and activities, and in what ways and to what extent transnational religious activities are related to the assimilation process of Korean immigrants in the United States. In particular, it will focus on the transnational connections of Korean Christians (Protestants) residing in the Denver area³ and the effects of these dynamic transnational religious engagements on Korean immigrants, the original country, and the host nation. By investigating what types and degrees of transnational religious engagement prevail among Korean immigrants and by examining the individual and social factors that shape transnational religious participation, I will present the extent and effects of transnational religious activities in the process of assimilation and draw a conclusion which can provide alternative ideas to the conventional expectations of assimilation based upon the experiences of Korean immigrants.

2. Statement of the Problem

Controversies about assimilation continue in recent studies of immigration. As Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky indicate, some scholars such as Richard Alba, Victor Nee, and Peter Kivisto believe that even though issues of ethnicity and race matter,

³ This location is selected because of its overall efficiency. Because I live in Denver, CO and serve a Korean church as the director of Christian education, it is convenient and efficient for me to collect data and interview Korean Christians in this area.

most immigrants will achieve assimilation into the mainstream American society.⁴ On the other hand, to overcome the deficiencies of the conventional concepts of assimilation, Alejandro Portes, Rubén G. Rumbaut, and Min Zhou propose the “segmented assimilation theory.” Referring to Zhou’s own explanation, there are three possible patterns of adaptation that can occur among the new immigrants and their descendents: “One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity.”⁵

It is true that some degree of assimilation is inevitable, but its extent and significance are subject to debate. Several factors, such as the formation of ethnic niches and transnational activities, affect the assimilation process in terms of degree and speed. In particular, “by virtue of technological advances, changes in government policies in the host and home countries, and globalization of the economy, contemporary immigrants maintain close social, cultural, economic, and political ties with their home countries unimaginable to the earlier immigrants.”⁶ Thus, in contemporary religious studies, “more scholars recognize that some immigrants and their descendents remain strongly

⁴ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” *The Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 130.

⁵ Min Zhou, “Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation,” in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, eds. Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh Dewind (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 196.

⁶ Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds., *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 27.

influenced by their continuing ties to their home country or by social networks that stretch across national borders.”⁷ If adopting the conventional meaning of assimilation which emphasizes the full adaptation of immigrants to the host society, “[t]he main hypothesis derived from this perspective is that the longer immigrants live and are socialized into the ways of the host society, the greater the likelihood of their becoming thoroughly absorbed in it. As far as transnationalism is concerned, the logical corollary here is that longer periods of U.S. residence should lead to progressive disengagement from old country loyalties and attachments.”⁸ Yet, given the changing global environment and different experiences of the new immigrants, it is necessary to delve into the question of how the notions and patterns of immigration and assimilation change through the lens of transnational migration that focuses on the connection of immigrants to the context of both sending and receiving countries.

When dealing with issues of assimilation in relation to the transnational activities of recent immigrants, however, most scholarly works focus on political, economic, and cultural aspects rather than religious activities. The study of world or global religions has a long history, and the history of transnational religious activities is not new. However, as Levitt affirms, “the role that religion plays in enabling transnational membership has only recently begun to be taken into account.”⁹ And different from the earlier studies of

⁷ Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society,” *International Migration Review* 38 (2004): 1002.

⁸ Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes, and William Haller, “Assimilation and Transnationalism: Determinants of Transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants,” *The American Journal of Sociology* Volume 108 no.6 (2003): 1215.

⁹ Peggy Levitt, “‘You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant’: Religion and Transnational Migration,” *International Migration Review* 37 (2003): 847.

transnational connections, which primarily focused on material exchanges, more scholars agree that “the impact of transnationalism may be much more widespread than originally thought, as communities’ values and belief systems, including religion, change based on their interconnections across national boundaries.”¹⁰ In the process of immigration and assimilation, religion plays a crucial role in identity construction, meaning making, and value formation in the lives of immigrants. Immigrants also tend to use religion to create alternative allegiances to their places of belonging. In addition, by transnational religious connections, as Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt emphasize, the new immigrants “not only add to the religious diversity of host societies, but also forge connections between societies.”¹¹

Although much recent work aims to fill the gap in immigration studies, which has overlooked the importance of religion in social life, the effect of transnational religious institutions and practices on the assimilating process of immigrants has still received little attention. Recognizing the transnational religious activities and creative adaptations of the new immigrants to new environments can enrich the study of assimilation, which reflects the changing picture of multilayered American society and its constituents.

¹⁰ Larissa Ruiz Baía, “Rethinking Transnationalism: Reconstructing National Identities among Peruvian Catholics in New Jersey,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Volume 41 no.4 (1999): 96.

¹¹ Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, “Transnational Religious Connections,” *Sociology of Religion* 69:2 (2008): 215.

3. Methodology

In order to critically investigate the relationship between assimilation and transnational religious activities, it is fundamental to define the discussions of assimilation and transnational activities. Even though the term ‘transnational’ has been popular in recent scholarly works, “[t]his surge in interest has been accompanied by mounting theoretical ambiguity and analytical confusion in the use of the term.”¹² Still ambiguously used, transnationalism is interpreted in relation to various aspects such as flows of capital and people and the formation of consciousness and identities. In this research, my use of the term transnationalism refers to transnational religious connections which immigrants and their children consciously and persistently retain with their original countries. It includes a wide variety of religious activities such as surfing internet websites of mega-churches in Korea, watching Korean Christian Television programs, reading Christian materials published in Korean, attending revival meetings led by pastors from Korea, visiting a home church in Korea, funding Christian institutions in Korea, etc. In addition, my use of the term transnationalism reflects the dynamic and reciprocal engagements of immigrants with both the sending and receiving societies. It cannot be unilateral considering the back and forth movements of people and the influences of globalization. For instance, while Korea originally received Christianity from American missionaries, now, churches in Korea are vigorously sending missionaries to America for the salvation of this seemingly secularized nation.

To examine the assimilation process of Korean immigrants through their transnational religious activities, my research examines both organizations and

¹² Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes, and William Haller, 1212.

individuals seeking long-distance spiritual and practical guidance to negotiate identities in a new land and find meaning to their lives. Yet, although it is hard to separate individual immigrants' transnational religious practices from the organizational contexts within which they take place, my research approach to religion focuses on the lived and practiced religion of immigrants in their everyday lives. When Nancy Ammerman uses the phrase "everyday religion," she defines it as "the many ways religion may be interwoven with the lives of the people we have been observing."¹³ Similar to her explanation, instead of the use of texts, doctrines, and religious symbols of their religious organizations, I will pay more attention to the unique beliefs and practices of Korean immigrants in everyday lives.

In terms of assimilation, the native-citizens of America generally require immigrants to conform to the socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural norms and rules of American society. In other words, when using the term assimilation, as Christopher Jenks argues, many Americans assume that "once immigrants arrive in America [their] goal should be to make [immigrants] more like [them]."¹⁴ This conventional meaning of assimilation needs to be modified based upon the changing global order and different experiences of recent immigrants mostly from the Third World. Exploring the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants, I will revisit and compare the various theories of assimilation to the findings from data collected from interviews and observations. Some standards to assess assimilation include, but are not limited to, language usage, observance of cultural tradition, and the awareness of self-identity.

¹³ Nancy T. Ammerman, ed. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁴ Christopher Jenks, "Who Should Get In?," *The New York Review of Books* (Nov. 2001): 57.

In the sociology of religion, data collection on immigrants' transnational ties and the process of assimilation generally relies on qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observations. Qualitative methods are used because there is a limited amount of statistical information available, and because they are appropriate for seeking the understanding of individual definitions and meanings of events. In addition, "The promise of the qualitative mode can be seen in its emphasis on naturalistic investigative strategies. These methods could enable the researcher to focus on complexities in actions and interactions that might be unattainable through the use of more standardized measures."¹⁵

For data collection, first of all, I contacted and chose two Korean congregations in the Denver area. I participated in the worship services and other religious activities of these churches to observe their actions and interactions such as exchanges of people, goods, services, and information across national boundaries. During participant observations, "main elements to focus on include the characteristics of people, the setting, the purpose, the distinctive behavior, and frequency and duration of the behavior."¹⁶ To obtain secondhand accounts, I also used unstructured (open-ended) interviews of thirty-two Korean immigrants of these two churches. "This form of interviewing takes the form of a conversation between informant and researcher and focuses, in an unstructured way, on the informant's perception of themselves, environment, and experiences."¹⁷ The

¹⁵ Robert B. Burns, *Introduction to Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 390.

¹⁶ Ibid., 406-408.

¹⁷ Ibid., 425.

theoretical issues in which I am interested such as assimilation and transnational migration shaped the interview questions and emphases of participant observations.¹⁸

4. Significance and Contribution

Given the changing global environment because of the rapid development of information technology, transportation, and other networks, the academic study of assimilation in relation to transnational activities of immigrants is significant in the study of immigration. “An emerging transnational perspective has brought new vistas on international migration. It has questioned conventional analyses that focus exclusively on assimilation to the host society, neglecting migrants’ ties and ongoing relations with their countries of origin.”¹⁹ Rather than assuming the inevitable process of assimilation, this study of Korean immigrants’ assimilation under the influence of transnational engagements can provide a changing understanding of assimilation, which emphasizes dynamic and reciprocal adaptations between immigrants and both sending and receiving societies.

In addition, due to the relative novelty of stable and regular transnational engagements, religious studies on Korean immigrants and their congregations have produced limited research of this phenomenon. Even though many scholars in the area of sociology of religion have paid attention to the religious practices and gatherings of

¹⁸ I contacted the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to learn about the process of the review and approval of this project. I took required training sessions and exams on the “Human Subject Protection in Research” through the University of Denver CITI website, <http://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp?language=english>.

¹⁹ Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes, and William Haller, 1238.

Korean immigrants and congregations, the topics of the transnational religious connection of Korean immigrants and its relation to the changing notions of assimilation have received little attention. Given this disparity, my research will add a new perspective in studies of immigration and religion by providing an account of the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants in relation to the assimilation process.

The scope of this current project will undoubtedly leave certain significant questions unaddressed such as whether different geographic locations affect the transnational belonging and assimilation of Korean immigrants, and whether transnational activities of other religious traditions have a similar impact on the process of assimilation of Korean immigrants to the host society. Nevertheless, by adding a distinctive perspective from the experiences of Korean immigrants and their churches, I hope to advance theories on assimilation in the sociology of religion and provide a beneficial understanding of how to envision the future of America where different groups of people reside together.

II. New Immigration and Assimilation

1. Immigration in America

In this global village, many people leave their homeland voluntarily or non-voluntarily with various reasons. Some are forced to leave and seek a safe haven outside their home countries due to fear of violent situations or being persecuted for reasons of race, nationality, or religion. Others migrate to get ample opportunities in terms of jobs, education, and better standards of living. Whatever the reasons are, the mobility of people is increasing at the present time. “The United Nations estimates that there are 214 million migrants across the globe, an increase of about 37 percent in two decades. Their ranks grew by 41 percent in Europe and 80 percent in North America.”²⁰ Extensively affected by new technology, transportation, and global networks, migration is expected to keep growing in years to come.

As one of the preferred destinations of immigrants, most people believe that the United States has been “a nation of immigrants.” Advocating such ideals of freedom, opportunity, and justice, the United States has opened its gate to immigrants, refugees, and political asylum seekers. According to one report, “Immigrants account for one in eight U.S. residents, the highest level in 80 years. In 1970 it was one in 21; in 1980 it

²⁰ Jason DeParle, “Migration: A World Ever More on the Move,” *New York Times*, (25 Jun. 2010), http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/weekinreview/27deparle.html?_r=1&ref=world (accessed 24 Feb. 2011).

was one in 16; and in 1990 it was one in 13....Since 2000, 10.3 million immigrants have arrived – the highest seven year period of immigration in U.S. history.”²¹ Therefore, it is not exaggerating to say that from “the founding days of the republic to present times, international migration has been the defining attribute of American society.”²² In fact, immigration has played an important role in the formation of unique American history and culture, and has been the primary factor that has contributed to ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversities in American society.

Despite the historical image of the United States as a nation of immigrants, the feelings of native citizens about immigration can be “described as ‘welcome tinged with misgiving.’”²³ While some Americans firmly believe that immigrants have been good for the United States, others accuse immigrants of increasing the rates of unemployment, poverty, and crime. The anxiety toward mass immigration and illegal immigrants is always present as well. In addition, because of serious economic and social consequences caused by immigration, immigration and naturalization laws were amended several times to ban certain ethnic groups from migrating to and becoming citizens of the United States. Therefore, since its foundation, Levitt asserts, immigration has been “at the heart of many heated conversations.”²⁴ And states of confusion over immigration

²¹ Steven A. Camarota, “Immigrants in the United States, 2007: A Profile of America’s Foreign-Born Population,” *Center for Immigration Studies*, http://www.cis.org/immigrants_profile_2007 (assessed 19 Apr. 2011).

²² Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, eds., *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 1.

²³ Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28.

²⁴ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 1.

issues have been prevalent among the public and academia. Therefore, it is not incorrect when David M. Reimers remarks, “Defenders of and attacks on immigration will continue. It will continue with emotion and probably produce ad hoc policies, just as it has in the past.”²⁵ As he argues, immigration policies from the California Proposition 187 to the new Arizona Immigration Law are still delicate issues, generating pro and con arguments.

Today, in this time of economic depression and unstable world politics, Americans are more concerned about the impact of immigrants upon the economy and unity of the United States whereas previous generations of Americans were hostile in racial relations and to religious differences. Some restrictionists insist that immigrants do incalculable damage to the American economy as they receive welfare and compete for jobs with native-born Americans. Others contend that immigrants harm the public order and the common heritage of American society under the guise of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism.

The presence of large groups of immigrants in American society is also believed to hamper social stability. “During economic downturns and during the recent terrorist threats and attacks, misgivings have been expressed and American ambivalence has been heard again.”²⁶ Accordingly, reflecting the general attitudes of society which have been aggravated towards foreigners since the 9/11 terrorist attack, immigration policies tend to tighten border controls and prohibit illegal immigrants from enjoying benefits. Yet,

²⁵ David M. Reimers, *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn against Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 154.

²⁶ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 9.

immigrants from all over the world still find their way to the United States. And Americans anxiously watch more immigrants coming to the U.S. in the future.

2. The New Immigrants

Despite the continuity in the influx of immigrants, the trend of immigration is rapidly changing, remaking the fabric of American society. Portes and Rumbaut affirm that, different from the previous migration wave, “today’s immigrants are drawn not from Europe but overwhelmingly from the developing nations of the Third World, especially from Asia and Latin America.”²⁷ Levitt explains a changing mode of contemporary immigration more concretely. According to her, “In the early 1900s, the top five countries sending immigrants to the United States were Italy, Russia, Hungary, Austria, and the United Kingdom; one hundred years later, they were Mexico, the Philippines, China, India, and the Dominican Republic.”²⁸ As these scholars describe, many people from the Third World rush to the United States because of the picture of American society as a land of hope and opportunity.

This dramatic difference in immigration patterns is primarily caused by changing immigration laws. “Immigration policies and trends have altered the national profile, in terms of nations of origin, ethno-racial, linguistic, religious, and other characteristics.”²⁹ Previous immigration acts were not favorable to non-whites, specifically non- Anglo-

²⁷ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 17.

²⁸ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 27.

²⁹ Karen I. Leonard et al., eds., *Immigrants Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 5.

Saxon-Protestant whites. In 1882, the Congress passed a law “that excluded the entry of Chinese laborers for twenty years.”³⁰ “The Chinese [were] the first racial group in American history subject to federal exclusion rules.”³¹ Chinese people were banned because they were believed to be a serious threat to the preservation of authentic American culture. Then, a quota system, first introduced in 1921, established national quotas on immigration based on the number of foreign-born residents of each nationality who resided in the United States. In 1924, the quota system was changed to give a more generous quota to desirable nationalities like England and Germany than Russians or Italians. By then, almost all Asians were still excluded.

Yet, one detailed report on “Race and Hispanic Origin of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2007” illustrates significant demographic changes among foreign-born populations for the last several decades.³² According to this report, percent distribution of the foreign-born population between 1960 and 2007 shows sudden growth of immigrants from the Third world. In 1960, while Europeans made up 75 percent of foreign-born population, the number decreased to 13.1 percent in 2007. In contrast, the number of Asians grew from 5.1 percent in 1960 to 26.8 percent in 2007, and Latin American immigrants, who accounted for 9.4 percent in 1960, currently constitute more than half of the foreign-born population in 2007. Regarding this prominent change in the constitution of immigrant groups, this report finds its cause in altered immigration laws:

³⁰ Daniel Kanstroom, 109.

³¹ John S. W. Park, *Elusive Citizenship: Immigration, Asian Americans, and the Paradox of Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 54.

³² Elizabeth M. Grieco, “Race and Hispanic Origin of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2007,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, [http:// www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acs-11.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acs-11.pdf) (accessed 15 Oct. 2010).

New waves of immigrants began arriving in the United States following amendments to the Immigration Act in 1965 that abolished the national origins quota system, resulting in a shift away from traditional source countries to a greater diversity in the origins of the foreign born. Unlike during the great migration of the late 1800s and early 1900s when the majority of immigrants to the United States came from countries in Europe, most of the immigrants who arrived after 1979 were from countries in Latin America and Asia.³³

As this analysis shows, it has been agreed upon that the immigration act of 1965 changed the whole picture of the formation of American society. Unlike previous immigration acts which showed preference to specific groups from Europe, it was “a watershed moment in U.S. history....[I]t finally ended the national origins quota system that had stamped immigration law since the 1920s.”³⁴ By this new Act, priority was given to family reunification so that American citizens and permanent residents could sponsor immigrants. Prior to 1965, non-European immigrants accounted for low rates of immigration, and thus, the supporters of this 1965 Act anticipated most immigration from Europe. The result was quite the opposite. There was a major growth of immigrants from the Third World. While most European immigrants did not have many immediate family members left in Europe to sponsor, immigrants from the Third World saw this as a great opportunity to bring family members and relatives to the United States. As a result, a sudden increase of immigrants came from Asia and Latin America rather than from Europe.

To be sure, this new trend is not the first immigration wave that brings Asians and Latin Americans to the United States. In spite of the general antagonism toward these nonwhites, out of necessity, workers from these poor countries used to be imported for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Daniel Kanstroom, 225.

laborious tasks. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz give detailed information:

Although the 1965 Immigration Reform Act was central in diversifying the national origins of immigrants by allowing larger quotas from Asia and Latin America and decreasing European quotas, it was not the first time that non-Europeans had immigrated in substantial numbers. Earlier events, such as the Mexican *bracero* (guest worker) program of 1942-1964 and the importation of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino railroad and agricultural workers early in the century, also brought non-Europeans to the United States.³⁵

Nevertheless, it was the new immigration policy of 1965 that officially demolished former restrictions, which had barely allowed Asians and Latin Americans to immigrate and settle into the United States. It also initiated the growing influx of the ‘new’ immigrants who rarely share commonalities with the ‘old’ currents of immigration mostly from European countries.

Gaining momentum by the passage of the new 1965 Immigration Act, Ebaugh and Chafetz explain, the new immigrants, “those who have arrived in the United States in the past three or four decades, have introduced diversity of all kinds into American society. They are racially and ethnically more varied than earlier streams of immigrants; they come from a greater variety of countries and continents; they speak more varied languages; ...many bring with them religions that are either new or little known in this country.”³⁶ The presence of racially and ethnically diverse immigrants has caused modifications in many aspects of American society such as public education, the economic system, religious affiliation, etc. Given this situation, it is no wonder that the

³⁵ Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant Congregations* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000), 13-14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

emerging demographic diversity has raised fundamental questions about America's identity and solidarity. Americans have asked how the United States can sustain a more cohesive culture and homogeneous society with intensifying and diverse ethnic cultures and identities. Hearing strange languages in public places and noticing distinctive cultural traditions in their neighborhood, they have searched for noble ways of establishing unity in diversity. At the same time, however, antipathy from and anxiety of native-citizens increased, requiring the new immigrants to adapt to the American way of life, discarding the seemingly strange and less civilized imports from poor nations.

3. The Conventional Understanding of Assimilation

Confronting newcomers and the diversity among them, the host group gets concerned about how to maintain a cohesive and more homogeneous society with different groups of people. In an attempt to develop pertinent answers to whether and how immigrants learn to live as part of the host society, assimilation has been one of the primary issues in dealing with immigration. However, "considerable confusion exists about what assimilation actually means, and many scholars persist in being suspicious about assimilation, either for its presumed ideological biases or empirical inadequacies."³⁷ Peter Kivisto indicates this difficulty in defining assimilation.

"Discourses on assimilation as a fact and as an ideal are often intermingled, so that what is in fact the case and what might or might not be desired are difficult to analytically distinguish. Add to this the fact that there is no shared definition of assimilation, and the

³⁷ Peter Kivisto, ed., *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 3.

result is that, at times, in debates over the reality, efficacy, or desirability of assimilation the participants often talk past one another.”³⁸ As his remark indicates, it is rare to reach a consensus about the meaning of assimilation and opposing theories and ideas are generated.

Despite the intricacy and disagreement of opinions, many scholars endeavor to suggest a proper way to follow for immigrants and their children to adjust to a new environment. Scholars agree that, among various theories, Park and his colleagues laid a foundation in the academic understanding of assimilation. Kivisto affirms, “Robert Park, in conjunction with key colleagues of his at the University of Chicago such as W. I. Thomas and Ernest Burgess, is generally and appropriately considered to be the sociologist most responsible for the canonical formulation of assimilation theory.”³⁹ The classic work of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, gives a definition of assimilation. “Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.”⁴⁰ Defining assimilation in this way, Alba and Nee evaluate, “Park’s legacy is closely identified with the notion of assimilation as the end stage of a ‘race-relations cycle’ of ‘contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation,’ a sequence that, in his best-known

³⁸ Ibid., 4.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 735.

formulation, was viewed as ‘apparently progressive and irreversible’.⁴¹ As still a matter of debate, it is generally believed that Park and his colleagues “theorized that assimilation was a rather straight-lined, even inevitable process – for most whites – in which it was assumed that newcomers would shed past allegiances and customs and embrace Americanization.”⁴²

Another classic work, Milton Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life*, shares similar ideas in terms of the inevitable process of assimilation to the American mainstream. “The view of assimilation as linear progress, with sociocultural similarity and socioeconomic success marching in lock step, was not so much challenged as refined by Milton Gordon.”⁴³ In this book, he discerns “seven types or stages of assimilation: cultural or behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation.”⁴⁴ Regardless of racial and ethnic differences and diversity in speed of adaptation, following these stages is inescapable for new groups of people to fully become Americans. He claims that “[e]ven in the case of the American Negro, from the long view or perspective of American history, this effect of discrimination will be seen to have been a delaying action only; the quantitatively

⁴¹ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20.

⁴² Elliott R. Barkan, 6.

⁴³ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality,” *International Migration Review* Volume 31 no.4 (1997): 925.

⁴⁴ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 71.

significant emergence of the middle-class Negro is already well on its way.”⁴⁵ W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, in *The Social Systems of American Ethnic groups*, also provide a similar idea though recognizing the problematic assimilation process of ethnic minorities because of their skin color and diverse religious tradition. “Our political organization permits all adults to be equal within its structure. Although at first this equality is largely theoretical, it gives the ethnic members an attainable goal as the political success of the Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, and Italians demonstrates.”⁴⁶

As these prominent scholars illustrate, it is most common that the native citizens require immigrants to conform to the socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural norms and rules of the mainstream American society. This perspective of assimilation presupposes the presence of a core identity and culture in American society to which immigrants adapt. According to Will Herberg, “Our cultural assimilation has taken place not in a ‘melting pot,’ but rather in a ‘transmuting pot’ in which all ingredients have been transformed and assimilated to an idealized ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model....The ‘Anglo-Saxon’ type remains the American ideal to which all other elements are transmuted in order to become American.”⁴⁷ He uses the term “standard American” to refer to the Anglo-Saxon model which can be considered the core model of assimilation. That is, it is Anglo-Saxon-Protestant-whites who occupy the center of American society as a primary group, and other groups at the periphery must emulate them. Although the composition of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁶ W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945), 283.

⁴⁷ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 21.

mainstream and social stratification can change in different contexts, the term assimilation suggests a mistaken idea that there is an unchanging and fixed core or target to reach.

Accordingly, this concept of assimilation comes to impose subordination and passivity on immigrants who do not belong to the core group. “There is a certain fateful passivity and one-wayness implied in ‘assimilation.’”⁴⁸ But if the normative aim of American society is to make immigrants like the majority, assimilation is necessarily understood as a unilateral and coercive process rather than as a mutual and selective operation. Consequently, this conventional concept of assimilation tends to promote the negative images of immigrants and their descendants as passive recipients and liabilities, not as potential contributors and assets to American society. With this idea, immigrants are even depicted as a threat or burden to the national community. Thus, those skeptical ideas confine immigrants and their children within social prejudices, hindering them from developing proper self-esteem and self-respect.

Under these prejudices and misunderstandings, immigrants are pressured to discard ethnic association and their own cultural heritage as time goes by. According to Gans’ definitions of acculturation and assimilation, “acculturation refers mainly to the newcomers’ adoption of the culture of the host society. Assimilation, on the other hand, refers to the newcomers’ move out of formal and informal ethnic associations and other social institutions into the nonethnic equivalents accessible to them in that same host

⁴⁸ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality,” 924.

society.⁴⁹ As he illumines, assimilation implicitly requires immigrants and their offspring to cast away the whole ethnic heritage and replace it with allegedly superior social norms and cultural traditions of American society. Alba and Nee also explain assimilation in relation to the gradual process of reducing ethnic characteristics and ties to ethnic organizations:

Assimilation refers to the results of long-term processes that have gradually whittled away the social foundations for ethnic distinctions: diminishing cultural differences that serve to signal ethnic membership to others and to sustain ethnic solidarity; bringing about a rough parity of life chances to attain socioeconomic goods such as educational credentials and remunerative jobs while loosening the attachment of ethnicity to specific economic niches; shifting residence away from central-city ethnic neighborhoods to ethnically mixed suburbs and urban neighborhoods; and, finally, fostering relatively easy social intercourse across ethnic lines, resulting ultimately in high rates of ethnic intermarriage and mixed ancestry.⁵⁰

Assuming a simple process of replacing old culture with new one, this conventional understanding of assimilation seldom reflects the realistic processes of immigrants' transition and settlement in a new land.

This traditional concept of assimilation is indispensably related to issues of race and ethnicity. Although its defenders hide the ethnocentric hegemony entailed in this notion and allure newcomers to follow the path of the majority of Americans, an equal and full admission to the dominant society is very much restricted to recent immigrants. Part of the newer generation of assimilationist scholars, Alba and Nee define "assimilation as the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences....

⁴⁹ Herbert J. Gans, "Toward a Reconciliation of 'Assimilation' and 'Pluralism': The Interplay of Acculturation and Ethnic Retention," *International Migration Review* Volume 31, no. 4 (1997), 877.

⁵⁰ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, 70-71.

[Newcomers] mutually perceive themselves with less and less frequency in terms of ethnic categories and increasingly only under specific circumstances.”⁵¹ They even predict the blurred racial boundaries in the future as “the rigidity [of racial boundaries in the United States] has already softened to a large extent for Asians.”⁵²

However, the actual procedure of assimilation is still deeply influenced by racial and ethnic categories. Antony Alumkal in his study of the second generation Asian American clearly shows the persistent racial and ethnic prejudices against them. “[M]any people of Asian descent still find that they are not viewed and accepted as Americans, but continue to be ‘strangers’ even if their families have been in the United States for several generations.”⁵³ Nancy Foner’s study on Hispanic population in the United States also reveals the hostile attitude of Americans to Latin Americans. “The label ‘Hispanic’ carries a stigma in New York, often conjuring up images of people who are brown-or tan-skinned, foreign in speech and manner, and unable or unwilling to adapt to U.S. laws, culture, and norms of hygiene.”⁵⁴ Likewise, African-Americans, the most discriminated group in the United States, still experience the prevalent racism and bigotry in contemporary American society. “The construction of the ‘American people’ as white has served to justify and perpetuate the subordination of the African-American population

⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵² Ibid., 277.

⁵³ Antony W. Alumkal, *Asian American Evangelical Churches: Race, Ethnicity, and Assimilation in the Second Generation* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2003), 11.

⁵⁴ Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 24.

as well as to assimilate certain immigrant populations and exclude others.”⁵⁵ Explicitly or more often implicitly, assimilation still entails white supremacy. “Indeed, one of the most profound adjustments to America is coming to terms with the fact that their skin color has such negative impact on their daily lives and aspirations.”⁵⁶ It is obvious that race and ethnicity invariably matter in the assimilation process of the new immigrants.

In opposition to these negative notions of assimilation, alternative theoretical frameworks such as cultural pluralism and multiculturalism emerge, stressing the rights of immigrants to keep their own cultural heritage and allow them to impact upon the formation of American culture and structure. Cultural pluralism is advocated when it is recognized that various cultures make ample contribution to the make-up of American culture. “Multiculturalism implies abandoning the myth of homogenous and monocultural nation-states. It means recognizing rights to cultural maintenance and community formation, and linking these to social equality and protection from discrimination.”⁵⁷ Zhou advocates multiculturalism because it “offers an alternative way of viewing the host society, treating members of ethnic minority groups as a part of the American population rather than as foreigners or outsiders, and presenting ethnic or

⁵⁵ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994), 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁷ Stephen Castles, “Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 288.

immigrant cultures as integral segments of American society.”⁵⁸ That is, cultural pluralism and multiculturalism basically acknowledge the fact that the influx of immigrants has a great influence upon the host society. Though less appreciated, in the history of the United States, it is true that immigration has always contributed to American culture and social structure, affecting the native population.

The question of how to understand the complex relations between newcomers and mainstream American society remains unconcluded. Regardless of its problematic definition, assimilation is still strongly regarded by some scholars as effective in proposing a plausible route for immigrants’ adaptation to a newly settled place of living. J. Milton Yinger vindicates the usefulness of the term assimilation. “Despite ambiguity in usage of the term and the controversies surrounding it, *assimilation* continues to be an important concept for students of ethnicity.”⁵⁹ Alba and Nee also conclude, “whatever the deficiencies of earlier formulations and applications of assimilation, we hold that this social science concept offers the best way to understand and describe the integration into the mainstream experienced across generations by many individuals and ethnic groups, even if it cannot be regarded as a universal outcome of American life.”⁶⁰ Under the blatant title of his article, “Is Assimilation Dead?” Nathan Glazer attempts to examine the current position of assimilation in American society as follows:

⁵⁸ Min Zhou, “Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation,” *International Migration Review* Volume 31 no.4 (1997): 982.

⁵⁹ J. Milton Yinger, “Assimilation and Dissimilation,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 174.

⁶⁰ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” *International Migration Review* Volume 31 no. 4 (1997): 827.

It is rather to argue that properly understood, assimilation is still the most powerful force affecting the ethnic and racial elements of the United States and that our problem in recognizing this has to do with one great failure of assimilation in American life, the incorporation of the Negro, a failure that has led in its turn to a more general counterattack on the ideology of assimilation.⁶¹

And he firmly concludes, “Is assimilation dead? The word may be dead, the concept may be disreputable, but the reality continues to flourish.”⁶²

At the same time, however, some alternative theories and ideas are produced based upon the complex experiences of contemporary immigrants, criticizing the traditional notion of assimilation. “Assimilation as a concept and as a theory has been subjected to withering criticism in recent decades....It has been common in this critique to portray assimilation as reliant upon simplistic conceptions of a static homogeneous American culture and to target the normative or ideological expression of assimilation – Anglo-conformity.”⁶³ Even though it is apparent that immigrants are at least partially assimilated into new circumstances after migration, it is important to shed new light on the multifarious process of the new immigrants’ ways of adapting to the host society.

4. The New Immigrants and Assimilation

Since the 1960s, the conventional meaning of assimilation, mostly based upon the experiences of European immigrants, has been questioned and challenged as it has a very

⁶¹ Nathan Glazer, “Is Assimilation Dead?” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 114.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶³ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 863.

limited application to the lives of the new immigrants who mainly migrated from Asia and Latin America. Because of the distinctive physical appearances in terms of the shape of eyes, the color of hair, and the complexion of skin, the new immigrants undergo different processes in their settlement in a new land from the experiences of European immigrants. For immigrants and their descendants from the Third World, there is an unbridgeable gap between themselves as ethnic minorities and the majority of American society. Although it is not assuming that the assimilation of European immigrants was always smooth and unproblematic, the remarkable difference of the new immigrants' experiences demonstrates more serious barriers in the pathway to assimilation.

Native-citizens of the United States have treated the new immigrants as aliens, even when they are fluent English speakers and share a common cultural background. For instance, as Ronald Takaki emphasizes, even though Asian immigrants "have been here for over one hundred and fifty years, before many European immigrant groups, as 'strangers' coming from a 'different shore,' they have been stereotyped as 'heathen,' exotic, and unassimilable."⁶⁴ With common labeling and stereotyping, the new immigrants confront the grave misunderstanding and prejudice of the host society. In this hostile social atmosphere, the new immigrants and their children feel that they are not fully admitted to the American mainstream society. As Fumitaka Matsuoka deplors, "Like all immigrants and refugees before us, we Asian Americans inexorably find ourselves on a common road to assimilation. And yet our 'racial uniform' makes it

⁶⁴ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1993), 7.

difficult to gain acceptance in the larger society. We are often ‘judged not by the content of our character but by our complexion.’”⁶⁵

Given this animosity of the majority of America against nonwhite immigrants, it is important to properly examine how the new immigrants adapt to America in a distinctive way. “A number of scholars have attempted to fashion new ways of understanding assimilation in light of the experiences of new immigrant groups.”⁶⁶ The advocates of segmented assimilation theory, Portes and Rumbaut define assimilation as follows:

The final stage of the [adaptation] process can be labeled *assimilation*. In the past, this concept has been associated with the notion of a straight-line movement into the social and economic mainstream by children of immigrants, accompanied by the loss of their original language and culture. In the present case... [a]ssimilation outcomes have become *segmented* as a consequence of the interaction between the social context in which children of immigrants grow up at present and the acculturation patterns.⁶⁷

They also propose and emphasize the benefits of “selective acculturation” that are “closely intertwined with preservation of fluent bilingualism and linked with higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectations, and higher academic achievement.”⁶⁸ Besides the segmented and selective assimilation theories, new theories and models continue to appear in response to the different experiences of the new immigrants and changing world contexts. In any case, alternative models attempt to

⁶⁵ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 10.

⁶⁶ Antony Alumkal, 175.

⁶⁷ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 247-8.

⁶⁸ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 274.

challenge the traditional notion of assimilation and present more pertinent concepts of assimilation to contemporary immigrants.

5. The Complexity of Assimilation

In a rapidly changing global world, in order to understand and clarify assimilation, it is important to acknowledge the complex aspects of the adaptation process of immigrants and their descendants. In accordance with the subject, object, purposes, and conditions of assimilation, the meanings and steps of assimilation vary. To put it concretely, there are many variables to be considered that affect the speed and extent of assimilation such as “recentness of arrival, age, gender, education, linguistic aptitude, occupation, long-term goals, cultural disparity, religion, the strength of homeland ties, the individuals’ (or community’s) location, and host society perceptions.”⁶⁹ In short, “Who is doing the assimilating, from what, to what, and for what are critical questions that need to be placed not only within the appropriate structural contexts, but within historical contexts as well.”⁷⁰ Moreover, Ewa Morawska stresses the notion of assimilation that seldom transcends specific time and space. Rather, it is inextricably related to sociocultural and historical contexts:

The main arguments for abandoning the classical assimilation theory have been that it was much too simplistic and ahistorical. It was indeed. If it is to be rescued, then, this model should be made more complex and, most of all, historicized, i.e., made time-and-place specific and embedded in multidimensional contexts. Rather than a universally applicable proposition, assimilation theory would thus become one of a number of possible explanatory frameworks in which the immigrants’ adaptation to the host (American) society can be accounted for.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism*, 4.

⁷⁰ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality,” 948.

Given the myriad elements that affect the adaptation of immigrants, not one conclusive theory of assimilation but potential theories of assimilation may be used to explain the distinctive pathways of immigrants to accommodate themselves to a new society.

In terms of the subject of assimilation, the new immigrants need to be viewed as active participants in the processes of transition and settlement into a new land. Though often vulnerable, they rarely remain passive recipients. They pick and choose among different options, mix and combine several things, and have power to make decisions for themselves. And they are willing to change at all times. Rumbaut expresses his understanding of assimilation as dynamic, inventive, and complex.

Assimilating processes involve the inventiveness of human agency, mothered by necessity and the sheer weight of circumstance, and the dialectical ironies of human history, suffused by pervasive processes of change of which the protagonists may be no more conscious than fish are of water or we of the air we breathe – all the more so in a world that is changing seemingly faster than are the individuals who seek to adjust to it. Neither assimilator nor assimilate are fixed, static things, in any case, but permanently unfinished creations with vexing degrees of autonomy.⁷²

It is crucial to always consider the autonomy and power that immigrants possess and wield in the process of assimilation.

Furthermore, given the fact that human relations are always interconnected, the process of assimilation must be also reciprocal. Though less recognized or emphasized,

⁷¹ Ewa Morawska, "In Defense of the Assimilation Model," in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 129.

⁷² Ruben G. Rumbaut, "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality," 953-954.

“Assimilation is a two-way process.”⁷³ In the assimilation process, both immigrants and the members of the host society are protagonists who actively involve making and remaking American society. Both parties are inevitably affected by this process, and all must be willing to accept some kinds of modifications in their lives. Yet, this two-way process does not end with interactions between newcomers and the majority group of the host society. “It is not, we now appreciate, entirely a matter of minority versus mainstream but includes the presence of other groups and their (positive or negative) influence, which can have a bearing on the decisions individuals make.”⁷⁴ The reciprocal character of assimilation is expected to happen over the whole social structure consisted of different groups of people.

On the other hand, assimilation undergoes contextual influences as well. The political, economic, social, and cultural settings affect the determination of the direction, degree, and speed of assimilation. Among various factors of given contexts, such negative aspects of society as racial discrimination generally disturb the speedy and voluntary assimilation of newcomers. “Immigration, under specific contexts of exit and reception, is followed predictably not only by acculturative processes on the part of the immigrants, but also by varying degrees of nativism and xenophobia about the alien newcomers on the part of the natives, which in turn shape the immigrants’ own modes of

⁷³ Elliott R. Barkan, “Race, Religion and Nationality in American Society: Model of Ethnicity – From Contact to Assimilation,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 203.

⁷⁴ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism*, 6.

adaptive response and sense of belonging.”⁷⁵ As to the importance of circumstances of assimilation, Rumbaut insightfully draws a line between ‘the melting’ and ‘the pot.’ “Still, as a master trope, there is rhetorical mischief in equating the melting with the pot: the emphasis is placed on the acculturative processes entailed in ‘melting’ while distracting attention away from a critical analysis of structural ‘pots’ and socio-historical conditions (not least fundamental differences in the manner of entry into the society, from voluntary migrations to enslavement and conquest.)”⁷⁶ The diverse conditions of the wider society are one of the primary determinants of assimilation of the new immigrants. Thus, when considering assimilation, it is also essential to pay attention to various factors in ‘the pot.’

One of the emerging issues in dealing with the new immigrants is transnationalism. Contemporary immigrants develop and maintain close ties to their original countries that were never imagined before. This ability to stay in contact with their homelands is an important factor that has a great impact upon the lives of immigrants and their descendants in contemporary American society. Especially, the so-called globalization greatly affects immigration patterns and adaptation processes in contemporary society:

The systemic role of migration in modern society can be seen as a constant, but its character changes in the context of economic and social shifts and developments in technology and culture. It is therefore necessary to examine the specific characteristics of migration under current conditions. Globalization is not just an economic phenomenon: flows of capital, goods, and services cannot take place without parallel flows of ideas, cultural products, and people. These flows tend increasingly to be organized through transnational networks of the most varied kinds,

⁷⁵ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Melting and the Pot: Assimilation and Variety in American Life,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 157.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 160.

ranging from intergovernmental organizations and transnational corporations through to international NGOs and global criminal syndicates. Globalization undermines many of the core features of the nation-state. It means, as Manuel Castells puts it, a change in the spatial organization of the world from a 'space of places' to a 'space of flows.'⁷⁷

In the context of globalization, the new immigrants are inclined to maintain transnational connections because of their efficacy and usefulness to deal with challenges they encounter in a new land. These transnational ties often mitigate the urgent need of assimilation and slow down the speed of learning about new societies, helping immigrants constantly and strongly attach to their homelands.

Moreover, contemporary immigrants often form transnational immigrant communities across boundaries. According to Levitt, "at least some individuals remain oriented toward the communities they come from and the communities they enter. This sustained and constant contact between communities-of-origin and destination prompted scholars to speak of what they have alternatively termed 'transnational migration circuits,' 'transnational social fields, transnational communities, or binational societies.'"⁷⁸ Instead of being totally disconnected from the legacies of their homelands, more and more immigrants and their organizations want to preserve their own language and cultural heritage even in a new nation. They are also interested in keeping up with the trend of both the sending and receiving society. Therefore, the increasing transnational ties of the new immigrants demand a reexamination of the meanings and patterns of assimilation.

⁷⁷Stephen Castles, "Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization," 279.

⁷⁸ Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion," *International Migration Review* Volume 32 no. 4 (1998): 927-928.

III. Transnational Religious Activities of the New Immigrants

1. Transnational Ties of the New Immigrants

Immigrants are those who leave their original countries to settle down in a new nation. But migration seldom makes immigrants fully cut off the psychological and practical ties to their homelands. Even after migration, immigrants tend to establish certain types of connections that span sending and receiving countries. These transnational connections consist of diverse patterns. While some regularly send remittances to their family members or relatives left behind, others establish economic enterprises that link the home and host society. Still many immigrants observe their own traditional holidays and festivals with co-ethnics, being attentive to what is happening in their mother lands. In myriad ways, immigrants live transnational lives that bridge two or more places.

In the contemporary global world, more and more immigrants participate in activities across borders. Portes and Rumbaut notice how today's immigrants live in transnational connections. "Immigrants today can keep themselves informed, on a daily basis, of events in their home communities and countries and travel there rapidly when conditions require it. They can call their families every day, regardless of distance, and send electronic mail to them as well as to community leaders and government

authorities.”⁷⁹ Given the increasing numbers of immigrants who maintain connections between several places, scholars attempt to shed a new light on the emerging ‘transnational activities’ or ‘transnationalism.’ In other words, in order to genuinely understand the experiences of the new immigrants in a foreign nation, they recognize that it is important to examine the lives of immigrants through the lens of transnational activities.

The transnational lives of immigrants are not new. As James Piscatori indicates, they have “long been a feature of the international landscape, even if it was not clearly recognized as such in earlier periods.”⁸⁰ With the long history of international migration, the ties between the original nation and the receiving country have been a part of immigrants’ lives. Old flows of immigrants from European nations such as Ireland and Italy in the American territory had kept some types of ties to their homelands. Levitt illustrates the transnational activities of earlier immigrants as follows:

Between 1880 and 1920, an estimated one-quarter to one-third of all immigrants repatriated. Many people also circulated between their home and host countries, working seasonal jobs during the warmer months and returning to Europe during winter layoffs. Like their contemporaries, they saved money to buy land, build homes, or support family members back home. Hometown clubs funded improvement projects, provided famine relief, and aided communities ravaged by war.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 131.

⁸⁰ James Piscatori, “Religious Transnationalism and Global Order, with Particular Consideration of Islam,” in *Religion and Global Order*, eds. John L. Esposito and Michael Watson (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 66.

⁸¹ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 28-29.

Though less acknowledged, the migration of population has always built interconnections with other parts of the world by various cross-state activities.

Then, what is really new about the transnational ties of the new immigrants in today's society? According to Foner, "transnationalism was alive and well a hundred years ago. But if there are parallels with the past, there is also much that is new at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Advances in transportation and communication technologies have made it possible for immigrants to maintain more frequent, immediate, and closer contact with their home societies and, in a real sense, have changed the very nature of transnational connections."⁸² That is, transnational connections today are quantitatively and qualitatively different from the past in terms of frequency, multiplicity, and simultaneity promoted by the dramatic development of modern technology and transportation. Portes also argues for the novelty of today's transnational ties. "I would add that the present transnational communities possess a distinct character that justifies coining a new concept to refer to them. This character is defined by three features: the number of people involved, the nearly instantaneous character of communications across space, and the fact that the cumulative character of the process makes participation 'normative' within certain immigrant groups."⁸³ He brings up frequency and spontaneity as the evident traits of transnational connections in contemporary society. As these scholars point out, it is obvious that the new immigrants involve much more regular and instantaneous activities that connect different geographic places.

⁸² Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 69-70.

⁸³ Alejandro Portes, "Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities," *International Migration Review* Volume 31 no. 4 (1997): 813.

As to the impetus of the emerging transnational ties, several factors can be mentioned such as the development of technology and transportation, globalization, and changes of national laws and policies. Renowned as the forerunners of transnational migration studies, Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc state, “[t]he increase in density, multiplicity, and importance of the transnational interconnections of immigrants is certainly made possible and sustained by transformations in the technologies of transportation and communication.”⁸⁴ It is evident that the proliferation of satellite broadcasting, mobile phones, web sites, and social networking services was unimaginable several decades ago, and this proliferation of technology decisively changes the way how people connect around the world.

Globalization also contributes to the high visibility of the transnational activities of the new immigrants. Ludger Pries accounts for the changing mode of migration under the impact of globalization. “As this century draws to a close, changes in residence across national borders are taking place within a general context of a far-reaching economic, cultural, political, and social process of globalization and the massive spread of new transportation and communication technology.”⁸⁵ Like this statement indicates, it is obvious that current migration pattern changes from international to transnational, reflecting the influences of globalization. Contrary to the experiences of previous people

⁸⁴ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 81.

⁸⁵ Ludger Pries, “New Migration in Transnational Spaces,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 3.

who usually dwelled within a limited boundary, the current population often crosses over several geographic places.

Besides the above factors, Levitt points out specific political, social, and economic circumstances of the original country and the host society as sources that are increasing transnational activities.

Several factors heighten the intensity and durability of transnational ties among contemporary migrants including: 1) ease of travel and communication, 2) the increasingly important role migrants play in sending-country economies, 3) attempts by sending states to legitimize themselves by providing services to migrants and their children, 4) the increased importance of the receiving-country states in the economic and political futures of sending societies, and 5) the social and political marginalization of migrants in their host countries.⁸⁶

The changes in national policies, social cultures, and economic situations, either positively or negatively, all influence the width and depth of transnational connections. Thus, Foner's statement is right when she declares, "much is new about transnationalism. Modern technology, the new global economy and culture, and new laws and political arrangements have all combined to produce transnational connections that differ in fundamental ways from those maintained by immigrants a century ago."⁸⁷

2. The Concept of Transnational Activities

Encountering changing migration patterns and differing concepts of nation-state boundaries, more scholars started to adopt the lens of transnationalism to better grasp the migration of people in contemporary world. During the 1990s, with the pioneering study of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Szanton Blanc, scholars such as Luis E.

⁸⁶ Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion," *International Migration Review* Volume 32 no. 4 (1998): 928.

⁸⁷ Nancy Foner, 84.

Guarnizo, Alejandro Portes, and Rubén G. Rumbaut contributed to the earlier articulation of the transnational activities of migrants. They endeavored to advance theoretical notions of various activities across borders, refining the term and theorizing what the term ‘transnational’ or ‘transnationalism’ really means. As Foner points out, “Since the early 1990s, a virtual academic industry has developed on transnationalism, giving rise to debates on a variety of topics, including the very definition of the term itself.”⁸⁸ Among them, Basch et al.’s explanation seems to become the foundation in this academic area. They “define ‘transnationalism’ as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”⁸⁹ Similar to this definition, Alba and Nee also mention, “[t]ransnationalism refers to the possession of ties to two (or even more) societies and, at its extreme, implies that individuals can be literally at home in, and participate in the life of, places that are separated by national borders and may even be at quite distant points on the globe.”⁹⁰ Though different in language usage, most scholars of transnational migration agree that transnationalism refers to the new immigrants’ diverse and multiple connections that span the sending and the receiving country.

Stemming from the term transnationalism, new words have also been created such as transmigrants and transnational social spaces or fields. According to Basch et al., “Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994), 7.

⁹⁰ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 145.

social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders we call ‘transmigrants.’ An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies.”⁹¹ In other words, transmigrants “are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationships to more than one nation-state.”⁹² Faist employs the phrase of ‘transnational social spaces,’ delineating it as “combinations of social and symbolic ties, positions in networks and organizations and networks of organizations that can be found in at least two geographically and internationally distinct places. These spaces denote dynamic social processes, not static notions of ties and positions.”⁹³ For him, transnational social spaces signify the active ways immigrants establish psychological and practical links with their homelands after migration. Whatever languages they adopt to explain the transnational ties of immigrants, it is clear that the new immigrants develop and maintain various transnational practices undergirded by new technology and the changing world order.

It is true that the emergence of this new concept of transnationalism in the lexicon of migration studies has not been free from critiques. Those who criticized the ambiguous meaning and use of transnationalism have posed various questions such as the novel character of the transnational activities of current immigrants, the scope and significance of these activities, and the lack of theoretical frameworks. Thus, subsequent

⁹¹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 7.

⁹² Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” 73.

⁹³ Thomas Faist, “Developing Transnational Social Spaces: The Turkish-German Example,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 40.

scholarship worked to elaborate previous scholarly efforts on transnationalism, attempting to answer to above questions. Such scholars as Rouse, Vertovec, Levitt, Faist, Morawska, Pries, and Foner endeavored to theorize various activities across boundaries. Yet, current studies on transnational activities are mostly based upon the case studies of the economic or political activities of Caribbean communities and Central Americans. Consequently, they need to be more diversified to include diverse groups of people and other parts of the transnational activities such as social, cultural, and religious connections. The following parts of this chapter will deal with these issues in detail.

3. The Character and Consequence of Transnational Activities

Given the importance of transnational connections for contemporary immigration, then, what drives the new immigrants to live transnational lives? The reasons for maintaining transnational connections cover various aspects of life from economic and political to cultural and emotional. Whereas some immigrants are interested in accumulating economic profits by transnational enterprises, others desire to participate in political matters in both nations. It is important for some immigrants to preserve and pass down their own cultural traditions, and for others to recover the meaning of belonging which has been lost after migration. More fundamentally, for those who want to restore social positions, to solace lonely hearts, and to find comfort in a foreign nation, transnational activities occupy an important part of their lives.

Besides individual voluntary involvements in transnational activities, the circumstances of the host society often play a role as significant causes of immigrants' transnational ties. In particular, the experiences of discrimination and marginalization in

American society function as a stimulus to keep transnational connections. “The limited opportunities the immigrants encountered in the United States, which they experienced as a ceiling on their mobility, coupled with the racism that continued to haunt their experience, although it no longer posed the absolute barrier it had earlier in the century, created conditions for transnationalism.”⁹⁴ In other words, transnational activities may be created and facilitated as responses to how the host society deals with newcomers. In this aspect, the transnational practices of current immigrants can be considered a strategy of survival and betterment in a foreign country.

This does not deny that the experiences of alienation and exclusion in the new place of settlement had affected earlier immigrant groups as well, driving them to return to their original nations or to develop transnational activities. As Foner asserts, “[experiences of alienation] fostered a continued identification with the home community or, among Jews, a sense of belonging to a large diaspora population.”⁹⁵ Yet, “Because most current immigrants are people of color, it is argued that modern-day racism is an important underpinning of transnationalism; nonwhite immigrants, denied full acceptance in the United States, maintain and build ties to their communities of origin to have a place they can call home.”⁹⁶ Compared to the earlier immigrants from European countries, the new immigrants, mostly nonwhites, continue to struggle with an inhospitable atmosphere of mainstream American society. External obstructions to full adaptation into the receiving society as well as the pursuit of individual purposes thrust the new immigrants into a

⁹⁴ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 72.

⁹⁵ Nancy Foner, 67.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

mindset of maintaining certain types of activities across borders to survive and thrive in a foreign nation.

Despite the apparent presence and persistence of transnational connections among current immigrants, there is not full agreement that transnational activities are prevalent in the everyday lives of the new immigrants. “A number of scholars questioned the scope and importance of the phenomena, arguing that too many claims were based on case studies, particularly those of Latin American and Caribbean migrants, who have a particular social and historical relationship to the United States.”⁹⁷ Several questions about the implications of these phenomena can also be posed, such as what kinds of effects transnational connections have upon and how much difference they make for immigrants and both nations. Furthermore, the relation of transnational connections to the adapting process of immigrants is one of the emerging issues in migration studies. “The recognition that some migrants maintain strong, enduring ties to their homelands even as they are incorporated into countries of resettlement calls into question conventional assumptions about the direction and impacts of international migration.”⁹⁸ That is, the coexistence of assimilation and transnationalism in contemporary immigration brings forth another question of how to interpret these seemingly contradictory phenomena.

In terms of the scope and importance of the transnational ties of the new immigrants, several scholars assert that this occurrence would be partial and transient as immigrants

⁹⁷ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 131.

⁹⁸ Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, “International Perspectives on Transnational Migration: An Introduction,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 3 (2003): 565.

gradually learn the rules and cultures of American society. As Levitt et al. notice, they tend to dismiss that transnational connections as having little or no leverage. “Some critics doubt that transnational practices are widespread or very influential. Others contend that migrants’ transnational practices are not new and that, as in the past, they will diminish over time among migrants and be of little significance for their children. Still others charge that the findings from the primarily case-study-based research on transnational migration often exaggerated or skewed.”⁹⁹ Roger Waldinger explicitly argues for the minimal influence of transnational migration, even being skeptical of the emergence of transnationalism or transmigrants. “Given these myriad, contradictory pressures, many international migrants *may* engage in trans-state social action of one form or another, but ‘transnationalism’ is a relatively rare condition of being....Likewise, ‘transmigrants,’ understood as a ‘class of persons,’ generally do not exist.”¹⁰⁰ According to these critics of transnational activities, the enduring effects of transnational practices upon immigrants and the original and the host society are trivial, unimportant, and thus, negligible.

It is true that not all immigrants are actively engaged in transnational practices. It is also obvious that the degree and scope of transnational connections vary, shaped by different factors such as reasons of immigration, length of residence, levels of education, economic standing, personal interests, and so on. Nevertheless, regardless of different degrees and patterns, transnational activities provide one of the crucial tools to properly understand contemporary immigration. In addition, in spite of the dubious opinions

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Roger Waldinger, “Between “Here” and “There”: Immigrants Cross-Border Activities and Loyalties,” *International Migration Review* Volume 42 no. 1 (2008): 9.

about the existence and persistence of transnational ties of the new immigrants, cross-border activities constantly take place in the everyday lives of immigrants and have consequential implications for related groups. Given the increasing number and extent of transnational links of the new immigrants to their homelands, it is not appropriate to devalue immigrants' practices that span borders. Moreover, in this rapidly globalizing world, individuals and communities are inevitably influenced by certain contacts and links with others.

From this perspective, Piscatori asserts that contemporary society is a world of 'networks of interdependence.' Carefully observing the changing world order, he perceives that the advancement of technology and transportation and the general process of globalization promote interconnections among different groups of people all over the world. "A significant part of this [network of interdependence] involves widening communication webs that alter perceptions of ourselves as well as others....The information revolution has had three obvious effects: (a) it has collapsed distances, subverting and altering notions of home and exile; (b) it has seemingly sped up time, marking awareness of the far distant as well as nearby events in terms of minutes and seconds, not hours or days as even in the recent past; and (c) it has stimulated a reimagining of the communities to which individuals feel an attachment."¹⁰¹ As he asserts, the concepts of time and space change in the contemporary world and so do interactions among people. More and more people realize the magnitude of interrelationships with those who are at a distance.

¹⁰¹ James Piscatori, 81.

Accordingly, more scholars attempt to explain the changing concepts of territory, boundary, nation-state, citizenship, and identity in relation to transnational connections. Stephen Castles doubts the traditional and fixed notions of territory and membership under the influence of immigrants' transnational practices:

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, globalization is undermining all the modes of controlling difference premised on territoriality. Increasing mobility; growth of temporary, cyclical and recurring migrations; cheap and easy travel; constant communication through new information technologies: all question the idea of the person who belongs to just one nation-state or at most migrates from one state to just one other (whether temporarily or permanently). These changes have led to debates on the significance of transnationalism and transnational communities as new modes of migrant belonging. Transnational communities are groups whose identity is not primarily based on attachment to a specific territory. They therefore present a powerful challenge to traditional ideas of nation-state belonging.¹⁰²

Levitt also challenges a dichotomous way of thinking about membership, stressing the simultaneity of current immigrants' ties to several places of living. She contends that "many immigrants don't trade in their home country membership card for an American one but belong to several communities at once. They become part of the United States and stay part of their ancestral homes at the same time. They challenge the taken-for-granted dichotomy between either/or, United States or homeland, and assimilation versus multiculturalism by showing it is possible to be several things simultaneously, and in fact required in a global world."¹⁰³ Unlike the customary understandings of citizenship and identity as exclusive, the mode of belonging of contemporary immigrants can be multiple and transnational. Many immigrants are developing and keeping ties to several places without experiencing serious conflicts in doing this.

¹⁰² Stephen Castles, "Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization," *International Migration Review* Volume 36 no.4 (2002): 1157.

¹⁰³ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 2.

At the same time, however, the notion of simultaneous membership in two or more nations raises a question of allegiance and loyalty to the destination of migration. Many Americans doubt whether it is possible and proper for immigrants to have dual or multiple citizenships in many nations. From the perspective of the native citizens of America, when immigrants set foot in American territory, it is imperative for them to abandon their ties to their homelands and endeavor to be in allegiance to their new country of settlement. Although it is no longer meaningful and proper to explain immigrants' lives in an either/or dichotomy, many people in the host society still have uncomfortable feelings towards transnational migrants who seem to be opportunists and traitors to America.

Despite the animosity toward immigrants who seem to play double, however, it is important to learn that newcomers and the citizens of the host society can understand each other better through the lens of transnational connections. "Indeed, one of the benefits of a transnational perspective is that it can shed fresh light on the past, highlighting connections and processes that have been overlooked or minimized in the study of immigration in earlier eras – just as it can bring new insights to the study of immigration in the present."¹⁰⁴ Thus, it is timely and appropriate to examine the patterns and ways in which the new immigrants develop and maintain activities across the borders of nation-states.

On the surface, the image of transnational links that span two or more nations may display the import or export of material things between geologically separated places.

¹⁰⁴ Nancy Foner, 63.

Transnational interactions surely include the trade of tangible objects such as remittances and other materials sent back to or brought from a homeland. But they cover other social and cultural aspects as well. Levitt's phrases, 'social remittances,' include "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving-to-sending-country communities."¹⁰⁵ In addition, deeper dimensions of life such as meaning, value, and morality are also exchanged between the original country and the host society. That is, by establishing transnational connections, the new immigrants participate in the flow of persons, goods, knowledge, and symbols.

In the process of establishing interconnections, transnational activities can change the nature and character of what immigrants already have. In this aspect, transnational activities are eclectic, originating complex and multifaceted outcomes that affect and alter immigrants and nations in relation. Transnational practices of individuals and organizations also produce collateral benefits and create new forms and meanings in addition to originally intended activities.

The observation of Pries illustrates this character of transnational practices. "The *communities* developed by international migrants in their new region of residence are not only an 'extension' of their community of origin, thus existing in a supranational space; rather, the transmigrants, i.e., international migrants whose migration courses are not one-time and unidirectional, form a qualitatively new social group in new social 'fields.' These new social fields build upon both the new and the former regions. They connect these regions to each other, though at the same time they are more than just the sum of

¹⁰⁵ Peggy Levitt, "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion," 926.

the two.¹⁰⁶ The transnational activities of the new immigrants cannot be simply considered actions of trade or exchange. They have power to create new meanings and values for people who live transnational lives.

The implications of transnational lives differ in accordance with the specific scope and degree of immigrants' involvement in transnational activities. Moreover, the patterns and forms of transnational links range over a wide variety of realms, at different intensities. Even though some scholars tend to concentrate on formal and directive transnational activities, it is equally important to pay attention to informal and voluntary transnational connections from the everyday lives of immigrants. As Daniel H. Levine and David Stoll insist, "an exclusive focus on formal organization and intentionality misses much of the action. Transnational influences work in more complex and varied ways."¹⁰⁷ As active agents and innovators, transnational migrants diligently make the international and transnational webs of connection in many areas.

Among many forms and types of transnational connections that the new immigrants establish, family networks are the foundation. "Family networks that span national borders...aid in the migration projects of their members in a host of ways....At the migration destination, kin – and not necessarily immediate kin – provide immigrants with the much needed shelter, assistance in locating employment, and knowledge that makes negotiating their new settings possible, all the while softening the trauma of the migration

¹⁰⁶ Ludger Pries, "New Migration in Transnational Spaces," 26.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel H. Levine and David Stoll, "Bridging the Gap Between Empowerment and Power in Latin America," in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 73.

experience.”¹⁰⁸ In the processes of transition and settlement, family members of immigrants either in the homeland or in the host society provide newcomers with practical information and psychological comfort. Karen Richman finds in her study, “Transmigrants return when they can for vacation visits, religious and family celebrations, to seek therapy and recuperation, and for retirement.”¹⁰⁹ More often than not, kin networks play a cardinal role for immigrants’ occasional visits and future plans. A hundred years ago, Italian migrants also used these transnational networks to exchange letters and send remittances. As Diane Vecchio’s study reveals that it was “the letter that acted as a conduit for forging links in migrant networks and it was the letter that transmitted remittances back home.”¹¹⁰ In contemporary world, it is typical for immigrants to keep continued relationships with their family members and friends in their homelands in and after migration.

Beyond this fundamental relationship with family members, the transnational activities of the new immigrants cover various aspects of life in terms of political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions. “Migrants’ political transnational practices include a variety of activities such as electoral participation (either as voters or as candidates), membership in political associations, parties or campaigns in two different countries, lobbying the authorities of one country to influence its policies toward another,

¹⁰⁸ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 82-3.

¹⁰⁹ Karen Richman, “The Protestant Ethic and the Dis-Spirit of Vodou,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 166.

¹¹⁰ Diane Vecchio, “Ties of Affection: Family Narratives in the History of Italian Migration,” in *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism*, ed. Elliott R. Barkan (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 115.

and nation building itself.”¹¹¹ In the area of economics, many immigrants are engaged in certain types of transnational activities. As widely studied, the total amount of remittances migrants send home is immense, especially in Latin American countries. Furthermore, while some invest funds in their homeland businesses, others operate transnational enterprises. As transnational labor and capital flows are increasing in this global world, the economic aspect of transnational connections is clarified from various angles. Cultural and social transnational practices are also important as more immigrants are interested in transmitting their traditional heritage to their children in the midst of learning the new society’s ethos and mores.

Apart from political, economic, and cultural aspects of transnational connections, “One way that migrants stay connected to their sending communities is through transnational religious practices.”¹¹² Compared to other areas of transnational ties, however, the religious realm has been overlooked. “The theoretical literature on transnationalism has devoted some, though minimal, attention to religious phenomena. The Vatican and the World Council of Churches have been favourite – and obvious – examples of the non-state transnational institution. But, for the most part, religion has been understudied in analyses of transnationalism.”¹¹³ Even though transnational religious activities are long-lasting conditions, they have been less studied and have received little attention.

¹¹¹ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” 136.

¹¹² Peggy Levitt, “‘You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrants’: Religion and Transnational Migration,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 3 (2003): 851.

¹¹³ James Piscatori, 73.

The reasons for the negligence of studying transnational religious activities may include the dichotomous thinking about public vs. private spheres of life and the modern clash between rationality and religion. For many people, “religious and family life tend to be more subjective, involving imagination, invention, and emotions that are deeply felt but not overtly expressed.”¹¹⁴ That is, religion has been limited to the personal and emotional realms of life that are rarely suitable for academic research. In addition, as Piscatori points out, the separation of religion and politics in American society could be another cause for the lack of appreciation of religious transnational links. “Churches and piety are properly private matters, and politics must be separated from religion in order to avoid dogmatism and encourage tolerance. National leaders must remain somehow neutral and removed from religious entanglements. As with ethnicity, religion has thus been relegated to the category of a problem that must not be allowed to intrude on the search for national unity and political stability.”¹¹⁵ Although everyone has the freedom to practice any religion s/he chooses, American politics need to be separated from religion because religion seems to obscure rationality and impartiality.

Furthermore, the tendency to overlook transnational religious activities results from the academic indifference to the inseparable relations between immigration and religion. “Despite the diversity and prominence of religious beliefs and practices among contemporary immigrants in the United States, scholars of both immigration and religion have tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality in the process of international

¹¹⁴ Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, 571.

¹¹⁵ James Piscatori, 73

migration.”¹¹⁶ As Kenneth J. Guest remarks, consequently, “as with much of the immigration literature, with a few recent exceptions, work on transnationalism has consistently ignored the role of religious networks and communities in the migration process and the process of building and maintaining transnational social and economic ties.”¹¹⁷ Levitt also states the dearth of scholarly research on the relations between transnational religion and immigration. “The role that religion plays in enabling transnational membership has only recently begun to be taken into account. For instance, Rudolph and Piscatori’s *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (1997), one of the few books employing a vocabulary of transnational religion, has little to do with immigration.”¹¹⁸ The formation and transformation of religious practices in a new land in relation to transnational links mostly passes unnoticed. Therefore, to genuinely understand the experiences of the new immigrants, the first step is to acknowledge the pivotal role that transnational religious connections play in the process of migration, transition, and settlement. It is extremely necessary to pay more attention to the relations of immigration and religion from a transnational perspective.

¹¹⁶ Jacqueline Hagan and Helen Rose Ebaugh, “Calling Upon the Sacred: Migrants’ Use of Religion in the Migration Process,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 4 (2003): 1145.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth J. Guest, “Religion and Transnational Migration in the New Chinatown,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 160.

¹¹⁸ Peggy Levitt, “‘You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant’: Religion and Transnational Migration,” (2003), 849.

4. Importance of Religion among the New Immigrants

Emigration challenges many aspects of an immigrant's life in terms of language, culture, and identity. Because of the magnitude of differences in a foreign land, immigrants also experience various psychological and practical problems after their migration. Given the struggles of newcomers, religion often plays an eminent role in the processes of transition, adaptation, and transformation of immigrants' lives. "Religion has been intimately tied to how men and women have interpreted, ordered, and constructed their own worlds, especially in negotiating migration and establishing new lives."¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, as stated above, "religion was initially a minor theme in the scholarship on the 'new,' post-1965 immigration."¹²⁰ Thus, it is a positive sign that "[a] rapidly growing literature tells us that religious affiliation and participation have been prime vehicles for many immigrants to cope with the challenges of their new environment and to learn its ways."¹²¹ In fact, it is religion that helps immigrants search for meaning and belonging in an often unfavorable atmosphere.

Religion was also significant for the earlier groups of immigrants mostly from European nations. In his famous book, *Protestant- Catholic- Jew*, Will Herberg illustrates that religion was central to identity formation and social structure of America. According to him, "[r]eligion has become a primary symbol of 'heritage,' and church membership

¹¹⁹ David Yoo, ed., *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 10.

¹²⁰ Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, eds., *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2.

¹²¹ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd ed. 300.

the most appropriate form of ‘belonging’ under contemporary American conditions.”¹²²

He contends:

With the religious community as the primary context of self-identification and social location, and with Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism as three culturally diverse representations of the same ‘spiritual values,’ it becomes virtually mandatory for the American to place himself in one or another of these groups....For being a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew is understood as the specific way, and increasingly perhaps the only way, of being an American and locating oneself in American society.
¹²³

For the previous wave of immigrants, religious identification into established religious affiliation was the easiest and fastest way of being a part of American society. In other words, providing immigrants with meanings of identity and belonging, religion has been one of the pivotal factors influencing the immigrant lives of previous years.

Likewise, religion occupies an important part of the new immigrants’ lives, but in different ways. Even if the new immigrants have the same religious traditions as Americans, they cannot assimilate into the mainstream society as the previous European immigrants could. Because of distinctive physical appearances, the new immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America encounter a myriad of difficult problems that might not have bothered the earlier immigrants. Unlike their earlier cohorts of immigrants, the new immigrants look different even after several generations living in America. In addition, the fact that their cultural and religious traditions are quite distinct from those of Euro-Americans challenges their full admission into the host society. Pierce et al. explain this complex position of nonwhites in America. “Asian American religious identities have been complicated by American racial ideologies, which have conflated the categories of

¹²² Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 57.

¹²³ Ibid., 39.

White, Christian, and American.”¹²⁴ They go on to argue that the “continuing stereotypes of Asians as ‘forever foreign,’ conveyed in backhanded compliments about English fluency and in insensitive questions about where U.S.-born Asian Americans are really from, engender a distance from the mainstream and a perception that whiteness is a requirement for inclusion in it.”¹²⁵ In fact, it is painful for the new immigrants to feel the antipathy towards them as perpetual aliens who seem to destroy the solidarity of American society and the commonality of American culture.

In this situation, the new immigrants desire to find practical aid and spiritual comfort through religion. Pyong Gap Min declares the vitality of religious activities of the new immigrants. “For Asian immigrants as well as for other immigrant groups, religion and immigrant life are inseparably tied.”¹²⁶ Accordingly, in many cases, “religion often becomes more important for immigrants.”¹²⁷ Contrary to the “old paradigm” which insisted on the demise of religion in a more secularized modern society, it is the new immigrants and their religious organizations that render American religious life more vital and diverse. Manuel a. Vásquez comments, “[p]ost-1965 immigration has played a major role in debunking the secularization paradigm. Migrants have brought to the U. S. a plurality of religious beliefs, practices, and forms of organization that have

¹²⁴ Lori Pierce, Paul Spickard, and David Yoo, “Japanese and Korean Migrations: Buddhist and Christian Communities in America, 1885-1945,” in *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau And Josh DeWind (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 106.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 101.

¹²⁶ Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds., *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), 5.

¹²⁷ Prema Kurien, “‘We are Better Hindus Here’: Religion and Ethnicity among Indian Americans,” in *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, eds. Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), 102.

transformed and revitalized the religious field, at a time when mainline congregations have been steadily declining.”¹²⁸

Given the importance of religion among the new immigrants, it is no wonder that immigrant congregations often assume eminent positions in the lives of the new immigrants. For the new immigrants, other ethnic organizations such as political or economic associations can seldom substitute for religious gatherings that play significant roles. Clearly, immigrant congregations support immigrants by offering a sense of belonging, fellowship, and social services. More concretely, as to the roles of religious organizations, Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf offers an insightful observation. “[Religious organizations] reinforce not only religiosity, or God consciousness, but also community consciousness.”¹²⁹ As found in this remark, the significance of immigrant congregations lies not only in strengthening personal faith but also in the formation of communal relationships. As a center of ethnic groups, immigrant religious gatherings serve to preserve and regenerate their traditions, customs, languages, and identities in order to transmit them to future generations. They are shelters and refuges where immigrants can escape from the painful reality in terms of language barriers, cultural differences, and racial prejudices in a foreign land. They are also places to meet with other ethnics to share information and experiences in common. In other words, immigrant congregations provide spiritual homes for uprooted “homeless” immigrants.

¹²⁸ Manuel A. Vásquez, “Historicizing and Materializing the Study of Religion: The Contribution of Migration Studies,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 226.

¹²⁹ Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, “Structural Adaptations in an Immigrant Muslim Congregation,” in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, eds. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 240.

5. Transnational Religious Activities of the New Immigrants

Learning of the significance of religion among the new immigrants and considering the high volume of current immigrants who keep their ties to their homelands, it is important to investigate how religion serves as a transnational agent and in what ways immigrants are engaged in transnational religious beliefs and practices. Like other aspects of human life such as politics and economics, religion links people and communities. “Because religion is a global societal system as transnational in its operation as the economy or the nation-state, it is no surprise that migrants use religious institutions to live their transnational lives.”¹³⁰

Transnational religious beliefs and practices are one of the eminent examples of how people in different places interact with each other. Levitt affirms this obvious fact in her book, *God Needs No Passport*. “Religion, like capitalism or politics, is no longer firmly rooted in a particular country or legal system. This happens, in part, because religion is the ultimate boundary crosser. God needs no passport because faith traditions give their followers symbols, rituals, and stories they use to create alternative sacred landscapes, marked by holy sites, shrines, and places of worships.”¹³¹ As an ‘ultimate boundary crosser,’ religion can be an important tool for immigrants to connect with their homelands in an unfamiliar foreign nation. For the uprooted, the recognition of being related through religion relieves shocks and presents feelings of protection and confidence in the processes of transition and settlement. In other words, transnational

¹³⁰ Peggy Levitt, “‘You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant’: Religion and Transnational Migration,” 848.

¹³¹ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 12-13.

religious ties serve as a buffer and a shelter for those who encounter strange language, culture, and people after migration.

But certainly religion as ‘the ultimate boundary crosser’ is not a novel fact. Religion has been transnational as it has been active in propagating its teachings across boundaries. “Unquestionably, for millennia people have cultivated religious ties across boundaries.”¹³² They have a long history in accomplishing cross-border services in the same way as economic trade and political relations. The history of world religions reveals the enduring nature of transnational connections across boundaries. As Susanne Hoeber Rudolph explains, “[r]eligious communities are among the oldest of the transnationals: Sufi orders, Catholic missionaries, and Buddhist monks carried word and praxis across vast spaces before those places became nation-states or even states.”¹³³

Piscatori adds a similar explanation about the long-lived transnational religious activities:

The historical roots of transnationalism go much deeper, in fact, and, at least in the case of the Christian and Muslim worlds, one could argue that trans-local networks and activities developed from the medieval era and probably earlier. In both Europe and west Asia, traders, scholars and pilgrims regularly crossed locally defined borders and created networks defined by broader loyalties, and in the Islamic world, the self-perception of a broad community of the faithful was well entrenched certainly by its late medieval period.¹³⁴

As these scholars indicate, mainly with the missionary work of religious believers, religion has been a typical transnational practice.

¹³² Alex Stepick, “God Is Apparently Not Dead: The Obvious, the Emergent, and the Still Unknown in Immigration and Religion,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 14.

¹³³ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Introduction: Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society,” in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 1.

¹³⁴ James Piscatori, 66.

Apart from original transnational religious activities in terms of mission and evangelization, immigration is also closely related to the dissemination of religious beliefs and practices across borders. Yet, as Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt indicate, only recently, “religion is increasingly viewed as a transnational phenomenon.”¹³⁵ The changing world order and advancement of modern technology and transportation facilitate the expansion of the transnational activities of religion along with increasing immigration. As a result, some scholars in religion and migration studies start to give attention to the transnational quality of religious beliefs and practices, though it is yet insufficient.

While the history of transnational religious practices is very old, it is the new immigrants who contribute to the development and maintenance of more intimate and intense religious connections across borders. As Dale F. Eickelman explain, “[m]odern forms of travel and communication have accelerated religious transnationalism – the flow of ideologies, access to information on organizational forms and tactics, and the transformation of formerly elite movements to mass movements – rendering obsolete earlier notions of frontier as defined primarily by geographical boundaries.”¹³⁶ In today’s global society, the adherents of the same religious tradition can simultaneously participate in activities from a distance. Religious organizations can also easily emulate the specific ideas, practices, and events developed from different places. For the new immigrants,

¹³⁵ Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, “Transnational Religious Connections,” *Sociology of Religion* 69 no.2 (2008): 209.

¹³⁶ Dale F. Eickelman, “Trans-state Islam and Security,” in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 27.

religion “ranks high as a tool for staying connected to a homeland, either directly, through membership in a homeland-based religious community, or by belonging to social and cultural groups infused with religious values. It also connects people to fellow members of the same religious communities around the world.”¹³⁷ More frequently and more deeply, individuals and groups are participating in transnational religious practices.

Given the significant increase of transnational religious activities, then, it is very important to think about the characteristics of transnational religious beliefs and practices of the new immigrants. First of all, they are often protective reactions to the hostile atmosphere of the receiving society. Because current immigrants are not free from the fetters of racial and ethnic labels, many times they confront impossible difficulties to overcome to be a genuine part of American society. Accordingly, the new immigrants choose to stay in connection with their old countries even though “[t]ranscending important boundaries is one of the most courageous and difficult of all acts.”¹³⁸ That is, developing and maintaining transnational links entails taking risks such as loss of time and energy, conflicts in two worlds, and failure to adapt to a new place of living. Despite the risks and perils, transnational religious ties provide the new immigrants with new meanings and advantages to overcome the hardships they encounter in a foreign country, to mitigate the feelings of marginalization, and to recover a sense of self-esteem and self-respect. They are strategic reactions to the bigotry and discrimination of the mainstream society of America.

¹³⁷ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 64.

¹³⁸ Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, eds., *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 32.

Secondly, transnational religious activities are always variable, reflecting the distinctive experiences of immigrants in their own contexts. They are seldom identical to what people in other parts of the world are doing. Individual followers and organizations modify the forms and patterns they receive into more suitable ones for them. For example, as Casanova argues, “The transnational character of Catholicism can almost be taken for granted, but historically the nature and manifestations of that transnationalism have changed radically along with changes in the worldly regimes in which Catholicism has been embedded.”¹³⁹ This explanation can be applicable to all other religious traditions. To make religious concepts and practices conform to their own conditions, the new immigrants and their congregations attempt to create new ways of operation.

Thirdly, in developing and maintaining transnational religious ties, it is crucial to recognize mutuality and the initiative of the ordinary. Influence rarely occurs unilaterally. Individuals and communities linked by transnational religion are affected and transformed by each other’s direct and indirect forces. Contrary to the general idea of transnational relations as a one-way process, they are always reciprocal. In addition, although a central force from above is still a pivotal factor in determining the direction of interactions between disparate places, in present-day society, transnational religious connections are more dependent upon voluntary actions of ordinary people. Rudolph shows an insightful observation on these types of transnational contacts as follows:

Much of this new transnationalism is carried by religion from below, by a popular religious upsurge of ordinary and quite often poor, oppressed, and culturally deprived people, rather than by religion introduced and directed from above. Well-known transnational structures – especially the hierarchical and bureaucratized Catholic

¹³⁹ José Casanova, “Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a ‘Universal’ Church,” in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 121.

Church, led by an evangelizing Pontiff with global aspirations – are an important component of the new transnational religion. But popular, populist, enthusiastic movements leavened by Pentecostals, Catholic charismatics, and ‘fundamentalist’ Muslims have spread more by spontaneous diffusion.¹⁴⁰

That is, it is the driving force of ordinary people that mostly affect the current development and maintenance of transnational religious activities.

The indigenizing process is another important characteristic of transnational religious activities. Religious activities across borders often undergo the complex process of combining what people receive with what they originally have. The new immigrants play a crucial role in the transformation of religious ideas and practices that span nation-states. For example, many of the new immigrants are “the product of missionary work done in Latin America and Asia during the 1900s. The descendants of those who converted bring their own version of Christianity back to the United States, asking to practice their faith alongside their denominational brothers and sisters.”¹⁴¹ Before their migration, in many cases, current immigrants were already exposed to Western-style faith traditions and had naturalized them pertinent to their particular conditions. And when they depart their homelands, they bring this distinctive form of religious tradition with them and reproduce it in new soil. The faith tradition they bring with them is not completely transplanted but transnational because of its exchanged nature across nation-states. As a result, when dealing with transnationally practiced religion, it is significant to consider that it always embodies the unique conditions of a given time and place.

¹⁴⁰ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Introduction: Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society,” 3.

¹⁴¹ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 14.

Finally, in the study of the new immigrants' transnational religious activities, the role of religious organizations also needs attention as they offer various transnational practices:

Religious communities are also structured and operating across borders. They channel flows of ideas, rituals, and values. They bring people and practices from different places together under the same umbrella. The resulting encounters alter the fabric of everyday religious life. Moreover, they provide members with strong, intricate, multilayered webs of connections that are perfect platforms from which to live globally....They offer solutions to ideational and cultural clashes that reflect the transnational reality of migrants' lives.¹⁴²

Immigrant religious organizations work more systematically than individuals in handling the flow of persons, goods, services, and symbols. That is, they "become intimately involved in the transnational ties of their congregants, and over time help to institutionalize and routinize these connections."¹⁴³ In addition, immigrant churches help the new immigrants learn unfamiliar customs and structures of a new society while comforting them in difficult times of sudden changes. In his article studying the central role of religious organizations in holding transnational connections for the new Chinese immigrants, Guest illustrates the concept this way, "Fuzhounese religious communities in Chinatown exhibit a strong tendency toward building and sustaining transnational ties to communities at home in China. These linkages assist people both in the migration process and in their incorporation into the United States."¹⁴⁴ Thus, when examining transnational religious ties of current immigrants, it is helpful to consider the vital roles of their religious organizations in developing transnational beliefs and practices.

¹⁴² Ibid., 134.

¹⁴³ Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, "Transnational Religious Connections," 215.

¹⁴⁴ Kenneth J. Guest, "Religion and Transnational Migration in the New Chinatown," 159.

Until recently, academic studies on transnationalism have generally focused on political, economic, and socio-political dimensions, leaving a less sufficient account of the reality of religion in transnational activities. In spite of its allegedly subordinate position in the academic study of transnationalism, religion plays a pivotal role for the lives of immigrants. Transnational religious activities sustain and undergird the insecure and unstable life of immigrants in a foreign nation. “These aspects of transnational lives are more difficult to capture but, nevertheless, critical for the emergence of transnational identities and landscapes. The memories, stories, and artistic creations that are harnessed to express transnational membership ought not be overlooked, even if they fall outside the purview of traditional research methods.”¹⁴⁵ Though implicit and hidden in many ways, transnational religious practices are one of the significant grounds for the new immigrants to manage their uprooted lives. Yet, due to the relative novelty of constant and intense transnational connections, both migration and religious studies on the new immigrants’ transnational ties have produced limited research. This is also true in the case of Korean immigrants and their congregations. While there have been many studies of Korean American religion, very few studies have been done on the transnational religious experiences of Korean immigrants.

¹⁴⁵ Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, 571.

IV. Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants

1. The Religious Life of Korean Immigrants

Many religious studies have noted the importance of religion for the lives of Korean immigrants in the United States. When examining the religious life of Korean immigrants in American society, scholars have focused on various themes: the prevalence of Christian faith, the role of religious organizations, the unique needs and concerns of Korean congregations, the relation of religion to the assimilation process of Korean immigrants and their descendants, and more. Despite the extensive studies on the religious life of Korean immigrants, the topic of the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants has received very little attention. Under the rapidly changing world order, however, it is timely and imperative to explore the religious beliefs and practices of Korean immigrants through the lens of transnationalism. A transnational perspective will provide new thoughts and insights about the religious life of Korean immigrants and their congregations.

Historically, Christianity was brought to the Korean peninsula in the late 19th century under the efforts of western missionaries who desired to evangelize the seemingly heathen nation. As to Korea's opening the door to foreign countries and their religious workers, Don Baker gives a detailed explanation:

Korea, tucked away in the northeast corner of Asia and far from major East-West sea routes, was the last East Asian state to accept some restrictions on its traditional authority and legalize Christianity. In the early 1882 the king of Korea began

signing treaties with Western powers in the hope that such diplomatic ties would serve as a counterbalance to growing pressure on Korea from Japan, which had forced its own unequal treaty on Korea in 1876. As the price of such ties, the French forced the king to agree to tolerate Catholics, including French missionaries, on Korean soil. Other Western powers soon demanded similar protection for their missionaries and their missionaries' converts. By 1898 Korea had succumbed to these demands, eliminating the major legal barriers to the practice and proselytizing of Christianity in East Asia.¹⁴⁶

In the complex political and international relations of Korea to other parts of the world, Protestant Christianity was introduced into Korea from America. It was in 1885 that Methodist missionaries by the names of William B. Scranton, M. D., Mrs. Mary F. Scranton, and Rev. Henry G. Appernzeller, and a Presbyterian missionary and physician, Horace G. Underwood, first arrived in Korea.

Throughout the history of Korea, Koreans have expressed rich religiosity in every aspect of their lives. Especially three religious elements, Shamanism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, were pervasive in Korea. Among them, Shamanism was the original religious culture into which the other two foreign religions flowed in, and therefore, it has been the key religious element in the religious mentality of Koreans since around the third century. For Koreans, religion was not distinct from other areas of life. The everyday lives of Koreans reflected the deeply embedded religious minds of Korean people. Yet, "when Christianity forced its way into East Asia in the nineteenth century, supported by the superior technology and economic clout of the West, it forced China, Korea, and Japan to begin to admit the existence of a separate sphere of human existence called 'religion' whose autonomy the political community must respect."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the religious

¹⁴⁶ Don Baker, "World Religions and National States: Competing Claims in East Asia," in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 151.

propagation from Western countries to Korea was shaking not only the legacy of Korean religious traditions but also the whole culture and its way of thinking.

From the beginning, most missionaries from western countries focused on the evangelization of Korean souls, and they were generally indifferent to distinctive Korean cultures and circumstances. In addition, Christian faith, accompanied by an individualized American culture, challenged new Korean Christians to abandon the seemingly superstitious and ‘barbaric’ religious and cultural traditions. Consequently, there were occasional conflicts between western missionaries and Korean people due to a lack of understanding. There were also serious clashes between newly converted Koreans into Protestant Christianity and the rest of the family members who still valued filial piety and ancestral worship. It was not easy for Koreans to confess Christian faith because being a Christian implied a severance of familial relations as well as of social mores and cultural traditions.

Meanwhile, Protestant Christianity that was brought to Korea gradually transformed into Koreanized Christian faith, responding to and negotiating with the unique sociopolitical and cultural traditions of Korea. Though taught by American missionaries who were mostly evangelical, Korean Christians developed their evangelical faith in distinctive ways. As Peter Berger asserts, “The origins of this worldwide Evangelical upsurge are in the United States, from which the missionaries first went out. But it is very important to understand that...this new Evangelicalism is thoroughly indigenous and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 166.

no longer dependent on support from U.S. fellow believers.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, “Korean Christians made Christianity distinctively their own, [emphasizing] the Korean Confucian tradition of hierarchical relationships and the shamanist tradition of religious emotionalism.”¹⁴⁹ Indigenous Christian faith on Korean soil has been formed by multiple contacts with the established religious traditions of Korea. It has been also affected by many national crises such as colonization by Japan, serious ideological fission, and the subsequent Korean War.

With the influx of Korean immigrants, this Koreanized Christianity was reversely introduced into American society. The history of Korean immigration to the United States opened with some students and political refugees in the late nineteenth century. After that, the first “[l]arge-scale Korean migration to America and its territories began in 1903.”¹⁵⁰ Initiated by American sugar planters in Hawaii and American missionaries at that time, more than 7,000 Koreans arrived in Hawaii fleeing from political unrest, hunger, and plagues.¹⁵¹ After the colonial period under Japan and the devastating Korean War, many Koreans left their nation because desperate poverty and hopelessness were prevalent in Korea. Some people who wanted to escape from hunger and poverty came to the United States as housekeepers or labor workers through the support of American families. Others, who were fortunate enough to be selected by American non-profit

¹⁴⁸ Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishers, co., 1999), 9.

¹⁴⁹ Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models for Civic Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 23.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

organizations or missionaries, were given the opportunity to study in the United States. Yet, it was the new immigration act of 1965 that broadened the opportunities for Koreans to leave for a land of dreams and opportunities. Therefore, it goes without saying that most of the Korean population in the United States is foreign-born because mass immigration did not start until the mid-1960s.

According to one document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Korea, as of 2009, nearly 6.8 million Koreans currently live outside Korea. Among those immigrants, approximately 2.3 million Koreans live in the North America continent (US and Canada), consisting of 34 percent of the total number of Korean immigrants.¹⁵² In the United States, most Korean immigrants are concentrated in big cities, such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. As Korean immigration to the United States increases, reasons for migration are diversified from higher education and material wealth to convalescence and a better future for their children. Whatever their reasons are, the common thought is that the United States is a promising country in which immigrants have ample opportunities for more successful lives than Korea where it is too competitive, crowded, and unstable.

The life after migration to the United States, however, seldom meets their expectations. It is harder and more painful than Korean immigrants had thought. Upon arriving at an American airport, immigrants encounter strange language, people, and culture. Moreover, they are treated as strangers, aliens, and ‘others’ who have different skin color, face shape, and cultural traditions. Korean immigrants realize very quickly that they are not truly welcomed by the majority of Americans, and they often have to

¹⁵² 외교통상부(Home Page of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Korea), <http://www.mofat.go.kr/consul/overseascitizen/policy/index.jsp> (accessed 3 May. 2011).

remain in marginalized spheres of life. For Korean immigrants, not only the xenophobic attitude of native-born Americans but also the language barrier, cultural differences, and distinctive physical appearances all function as obstacles to live as “Americans.”

Regardless of how long they stay in the United States, many Korean immigrants think they cannot be fully admitted to mainstream America.

During such a hard time of transition and settlement, many Korean immigrants try to find comfort through religion. Religion provides tired and lonely immigrants with meanings of belonging and social recognition. It also plays an eminent role in the process of assimilation to American society. Some scholars point out a significant increase of Christian immigrants, mostly from the Third World, as one of the methods of assimilation to the mainstream American society. Although the new immigrants add diverse colors to the American religious landscape, it is obvious that a considerable number of new immigrants confess their Christian faith to evangelical, Charismatic, or Pentecostal Christianity. According to Pei-te Lien and Tony Carnes’ study, “Christians (46 percent) make up the largest Asian American religious group.”¹⁵³ This number is very high compared to the percentage of Christians in Asian countries. Given this change in religious affiliations, Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind argue, “the overrepresentation of Christians among the Japanese and Korean immigrants by itself hints at this impact, for it seems to indicate that many nonwhite immigrants, recognizing the constraints that race might impose on their opportunities, sought to minimize other differences from the

¹⁵³ Pei-te Lien and Tony Carnes, “Religious Demography of Asian American Boundary Crossing,” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, eds. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 40.

American mainstream.”¹⁵⁴ They believe that many nonwhite immigrants choose to be Christians to win recognition as a part of American society.

This is also true for the case of Korean immigrants. While the number of Protestant Christians in Korea does not exceed 25 percent of the Korean population, around 50-70 percent of Korean immigrants in the United States belong to Protestant Christian churches. Historically, the high percentage of Christians among Korean Americans has been caused by both selective migration and post-immigration conversion. Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim’s study shows this characteristic. They explain, “Prior to their emigration from Korea, about four hundred of the early Korean immigrants were already baptized Christians. Within a decade, the number of Korean Christians grew rapidly and reached two thousands and eight hundred.”¹⁵⁵

Whether for smooth and fast assimilation to American society or not, it is evident that Korean immigrant congregations occupy an important position in the lives of Korean immigrants, supporting them practically, emotionally, and spiritually. According to one news article, as of 2009, there were more than 4,000 Korean churches throughout American territory, 1,300 in California alone.¹⁵⁶ There is even a joke about the flourishing Korean churches in America, saying that wherever they migrate, Chinese open a restaurant, and Japanese start a business while Koreans establish a church. Since

¹⁵⁴ Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, eds., *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 17

¹⁵⁵ Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, *Korean Immigrants in America: A Structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984), 47.

¹⁵⁶ 오수연, LA 중앙일보, http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art_id=967603 (assessed 5 Jan. 2010).

the early Korean migration to Hawaii, Korean immigrants have built their churches to find a place of consolation for their loneliness in an unfamiliar society. For Korean immigrants, their congregations are important social organizations as well as religious institutions. They are places for worship and fellowship, and even for other secular purposes such as exchange of business information, language education, and a marriage market.

2. Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants

Considering the unique history of religious life and migration of Koreans to the United States, then, what are the primary characteristics of their religious beliefs and practices today? Such topics as the high percentage of Christians among Korean immigrants, the important roles of Korean congregations, and gender relations in Korean immigrant churches are still common in religious or migration studies of Koreans. But the emerging phenomenon of transnationalism has little impact upon the focus and direction of those academic areas. Given the significance of the transnational activities of current immigrants, I will now detail the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants, answering several questions: how Korean immigrants and their churches exchange religious resources through transnational networks, in what ways and to what extent they involve transnational religious activities, and how their transnational religious activities have an enduring impact upon immigrants and their old and new countries. I will also explain how Korean immigrants assimilate to American society while keeping transnational religious ties to their home country.

In Denver and the surrounding vicinities, more than seventy Korean congregations have already been established. Compared to the total number of Koreans (approximately 20,000-25,000) in this area, the number of churches seems to be excessive. Accordingly, the size of Korean congregations usually remains small with around one hundred members, competing with each other to attract more Koreans to their churches. In spite of this high competition, new Korean churches are continuously established, insisting that they can better satisfy the specific needs and concerns of Korean immigrants. Because first-generation Koreans make up about 65-70 percent of the Korean population in the United States, most Korean congregations still pay more attention to those who have vivid memories of Korea than their descendants.

To investigate the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants and their congregations, I conducted ethnographic research at two Korean Protestant churches located in Denver, Colorado, between August, 2010 and March, 2011. My ethnographic research involved the participant observation of worship services and other activities and personal interviews with religious leaders and church members.¹⁵⁷ These two churches were selected because of their large membership and long history of service in this area.¹⁵⁸ One of them, Grace church, has the longest history in the Denver area, established in 1968 to serve a small number of Koreans including international students. Its current membership is around 250-300, comprised of mostly Korean immigrants and their descendants with three or four white American husbands. It provides two Korean

¹⁵⁷ In the two Korean congregations, I interviewed thirty-two Korean immigrants. I audio taped most interviews along with writing my own notes. Each interview lasted for about 30-40 minutes.

¹⁵⁸ I used the pseudonym names of the churches and interviewees.

language worship services on Sundays while a separate English ministry exists to attract English-speaking college and youth students of Korean descent. The other church, Denver Korean Presbyterian church, has served Koreans in this area since 1981. It celebrated its 30th anniversary last January. In spite of its reputation as one of the biggest churches with around 200 members, it experienced a serious schism under the previous pastor and is currently undergoing an unstable transition time under the guidance of an interim pastor who left during my research.

After observing their worship services and other activities and personally interviewing thirty-two church members, I could draw one clear conclusion: Korean immigrants live transnational religious lives. Even though not all Korean immigrants participate in transnational activities in same levels and durations, it is evident that transnational religious activities are common and prevalent among Korean immigrants and their congregations. Now I will describe in detail how Korean immigrants and my two case study congregations are engaged in transnational religious beliefs and practices.

1) Congregational Participation in Transnational Religious Activities

On August 15, 2010, I first attended Sunday worship service at Grace church after several emails and phone calls with the senior pastor, Rev. Park, to get permission to do my ethnographic research in that church. Even though the pastor reluctantly consented to my research in this congregation, later, he answered my interview questions very thoughtfully. On that day, I attended the first Korean language worship held at 8:00 in the morning. There were about 40 people who were all Koreans. Because I already knew that most church members attend the second Korean language worship at 11:15 a.m.

and the subsequent lunch, this small gathering did not bother me at all. The worship service started with Korean praises led by a praise team and was followed by traditional Korean-style elements including welcoming newcomers, announcements, expressions of repentance in Tongsung prayer, the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, and the singing of the choir. When I was introduced as a newcomer to the church, I received gifts from a welcoming team: a Korean Christian book written by Rev. Park, published in Korea, and CDs with sermons preached at the special early prayer meetings during Holy Week.

At the beginning of his preaching, Rev. Park mentioned Korean Independence Day because August 15 is the national Independence Day when Koreans commemorate the final freedom from the 36-year Japanese colonial period. Even the music sheet of an Independence Day song was inserted inside the weekly bulletin. In his sermon, Rev. Park gave various examples of politics, economics, and education from both American and Korean society. His sermon lasted for about 40 minutes. After worship, most attendees went downstairs to chat over bagels, cream cheese, and coffee. Some church members asked me what drove me to come to their church. After my brief explanation, one of the associate pastors, who was studying for his master's degree as an international student, shared his interest in my topic. But due to his busy schedule at church on Sundays, we could not continue our conversation on my research. He had to leave to lead a Korean language Bible study for elderly members.

On the same day, I visited Denver Korean Presbyterian church which is located within ten minutes of Grace church. Before its worship service held at 10:30 a.m., I had a chance to introduce myself to the interim pastor in person. The interim pastor, Rev. Kim, in his early sixties, warmly greeted me and encouraged me to join in any programs

or activities without hesitation. Expressing his support for me, he was even proud of his congregation as being selected one of the 'role model' churches. During the worship service, he introduced me to the whole congregation and explained my research. In this Korean language worship, there were about hundred people including many elderly Koreans. Compared to Grace church, Rev. Kim appeared to encourage the active participation of lay elders to lead several parts of the service. The overall construction of worship service was very similar to that of Grace church.

In his sermon, titled 'mature Christians,' Rev. Kim focused on Korea's Independence Day and asked congregants to continuously pray for the peace and reunification of Korea. He illustrated how Korean Christians faithfully endured the oppression of Japan during the colonization period and the religious persecution of North Korea during the Korean War. He also gave an example of western missionaries to Korea who risked their lives for the sake of Korean souls. With these examples, he tried to emphasize the importance of mature faith of Christians even in the midst of hardships. After the 20 minute sermon, there was a communion service with sourdough bread and grape juice which Rev. Kim called rice cake and juice, respectively. The worship ended around 11: 40 a.m., and I was asked by some church members to join in a traditional Korean lunch at the fellowship hall. The meal consisted of rice, soup, and several side dishes to share. The fellowship hall was noisy, filled with a gust of laughter, a rattling sound of dishes, and pleasant conversations in Korean.

Like most other Korean immigrant churches, my two case study congregations primarily consisted of first generation Koreans. Pastors themselves immigrated to the United States as adults, and most lay leaders in their middle ages also grew up and were

educated in Korea. Second generation Koreans rarely occupied leadership positions and there was a huge gap between first and second generation Koreans in these churches. Accordingly, the programs and activities of these two churches primarily focused on Korean-speaking members who have clear memories of and longing for their homeland. To satisfy their religious and practical needs, the two congregations developed and maintained various transnational connections. During my participant observation and interviews, I found many contexts in which the two congregations established their transnational religious connections such as the messages of pastors, the interactions of religious leaders, the exchanges of religious materials, the development of programs, and the sharing of religious values, morality, and identity.

First of all, the sermons, announcements, and religious columns of pastors in both Grace and Denver Korean church revealed their deeply engaged transnational activities. Rev. Kim often praised the enormous growth of Christian faith and churches in Korea in such a short period. He also emphasized the potential energy and creative power of Korean religious minds to challenge and change the seemingly spiritually dying American churches. He once firmly declared that American churches would survive by the spiritual power of evangelical Korean immigrants. He preached on one Sunday:

God sent us to this nation. Even though we received our Christian faith from American missionaries a long time ago, now, it is the time when we save this nation from such a corrupted morality and materialistic mind. God wants to use us as His messengers to this nation. We are chosen people for God's Work. Remember how much Christians in Korea prayed from early morning to late night. Like them, we have to pray for us, for our children, and for our nations.

Rev. Park of Grace Church, in his mid-fifties, showed his deep interest in recent politics, economics, and social issues of Korea. On the first page of weekly bulletins, he wrote his religious columns covering a wide variety of issues on Korean, American, and religious

ones. In addition, his sermons included old and new stories of Korean and American society in relation to theological topics. Thus, one church member jokingly told me that she did not need to read Korean newspapers because her pastor delivered all important news every Sunday. Especially, he often expressed his passion to evangelize North Korea and the mainland China. He encouraged his church members to financially support mission programs and pray for missionaries. He also regularly visited the mainland China in connection with Korean missionaries there.

Furthermore, the frequent interactions among pastors and religious leaders are another common form of transnational religious activities. Many pastors from churches in Korea visit immigrant congregations to lead revival meetings, retreats, and seminars. This type of transnational religious connection was also notable in my two case study congregations. On one Sunday, a Korean missionary to China preached at Grace's worship service while Rev. Park was visiting with an immigrant congregation in the mainland China. The Korean missionary urged church members to pay attention to Asian nations to spread God's gospel as American missionaries changed Korean souls long ago. At Denver Korean church, during the worship service on September 5, 2010, Rev. Kim mentioned the death of one of the most influential pastors in the Korean Presbyterian church. On the same day, he also invited his church members to attend an evangelism seminar led by a Korean speaker from the Korean Presbyterian church. He introduced the main speaker as developing an effective evangelizing system which is very popular among Christians in Korea. In addition, after celebrating its 30th anniversary in January, Denver Korean church advertised its spring revival meetings with a famous pastor from Korea. These illustrations are consistent with Wuthnow and Offutt's statement when they

mention, “Professional and other full-time religious workers who go from one country to live and work in another country- i.e., missionaries- continue to be an important kind of transnational religious connection.”¹⁵⁹

Transnational religious activities are not limited to the flow of people as discussed above. Besides it, “transnational religious connections consist of exchanges of money, knowledge, information, and other goods and services between religious communities or between donors in one country and recipients in another.”¹⁶⁰ That is, immigrant churches’ supply of materials and programs is another eminent part of congregational participation in transnational religious activities. Both Grace and Denver Korean church used Korean language Bibles, hymnals, and Bible study materials, importing them from Korea. Korean Christian periodicals and books were also popular items that these churches purchased for their church members. With these Korean religious books and magazines, the two churches operated their own libraries so that church members always checked them out. Even each month Rev. Park put a book list of two or three Korean Christian books he recommended to his congregants to read. The two churches also imported various things from choir robes to offering envelopes directly from Korea or indirectly through retail stores in Los Angeles or New York.

In terms of religious programs, Grace church actively emulated new and popular programs of churches in Korea. The CDs that I received as welcome gifts recorded sermons during “special” early prayer meetings. Like churches in Korea, most Korean immigrant churches have early prayer meetings starting around 5:30 a.m. or 6:00 a.m.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt, 216.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 221.

five times a week. In Korea, attending an early prayer meeting is one of the signs of faithful Christians. Some mega-churches even offer two early prayer meetings every day to which several thousands flock. In addition, during important church or national holidays such as New Year's week and Holy week, they present "special" early prayer meetings. Grace church followed this hot trend of churches in Korea, offering specially designated early prayer meetings. During the season of Advent, Rev. Park encouraged church members to attend special early prayer meetings to prepare for the coming of Christ. Above all, to keep up with the development of information technology, Grace church designed its own website and offered multiple social media services which simultaneously conveyed knowledge and information from Korea. Through many links, church members could access many religious programs happening in other parts of the world. Denver Korean Church temporarily stopped the operation of its website since its serious schism.

Besides sermons, programs, and materials, through transnational religious networks and activities, I noted that these two congregations provided their members with psychological and emotional support. When I asked the question of why they chose to attend Korean immigrant churches, most respondents answered that they wanted to console their tired and lonely souls in a familiar environment. They also shared that they could find comfort in a foreign nation by establishing close relationships with other Koreans. Mrs. Choi, who lived in America for 34 years and considered herself an American, professed why she continued attending a Korean church:

I think I am an American now. I spent more time in America than in Korea. I can communicate with my children and friends in English, and I do not really need to eat Korean food everyday. Instead of watching Korean soap operas like other Korean women, I watch the 9 news every morning. Despite these changes in America, I still

feel something is missing in my heart. That is why I am attending a Korean church. For me, Korean church is like a hometown where I feel comfortable and stable. Especially, the Korean hymnal I used to sing in my early days reminds me of childhood memories and makes me happy.

As speaking Korean language, reading a Korean Bible, and sharing Korean traditions with other Koreans, it seemed that the members of the two congregations felt relieved from the feelings of loneliness and the burdens of learning and assimilating to the foreign elements of American society.

In particular, I found that the negotiation and recreation of identity in a new land was one of the important tasks of the two congregations that their church members expected. Even though not many interviewees were articulate to explain the senses of belonging and identity, they implicitly mentioned the significance of their churches in establishing the meanings of their new lives in American society. Mr. Cho of Denver Korean church explained his thought on the formation of identity in a foreign nation as follows:

Everything was strange to me. Everyone was different from me. In Korea, we were all alike with black hairs and black eyes. I felt that everyone in the street stared at me because I looked different. But, after I found this congregation and other Korean church members, I started to cherish my Korean roots in this soil. You know, an old saying tells us if you go abroad, you would be patriots. Here, I could think about myself again and again.

Mr. Lee, in his late fifties, defined the identity of Koreans in this nation as the royal family of God. He explained:

Look at the Jews. Despite their tragic past, they have been so successful in this country. Like them, to thrive in this nation, it is important for us not to forget about our Korean identity. We should take pride in being Koreans. We are the royal family of God in this foreign nation. Thus, it is very important for our church to teach that to our children.

Many scholars indicate that religious organizations help immigrants negotiate and develop answers to the questions of belonging and identity in a foreign country. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang illustrate how Asian Americans use ethnic organizations for the recreation of identity. “Asian Americans use religious conversations in religious spaces to face questions about their relation to their country of origin, personal and collective identities, and the organization of American society and culture. Religious imperatives powerfully intersect self, family, and society and prescribe certain relationships among them.”¹⁶¹ As they contend, it was clear that the two congregations played an important role in providing a sense of belonging, identity, and fellowship for their members through religious connections across borders and boundaries.

In my study of the congregational level of transnational religious activities, another interesting finding was that immigrant churches seemed to play contradictory and inconsistent roles: an agency of assimilation into a new land versus a vehicle to preserve ethnic language, culture, and identity. Fumitaka Matsuoka points out the ambiguous roles of Asian American churches arguing, “[Asian American churches] have played a critical role in building and sustaining community for their own people....On the other hand, as carriers of a particular American religious and cultural tradition inherited from Europe, Asian American churches often served to set that tradition against Asian American communities.”¹⁶² The ambiguity of immigrant churches could be applied to my two case study congregations. On the one hand, the two churches assisted their

¹⁶¹ Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, eds., *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁶² Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 15-16.

members to find a job and learn the American way of life. Their churches were one of the best places for members to share information about how to live well in American society. On the other hand, they fostered the preservation of ethnic language and cultural practices. By observing holidays of their homeland and offering Korean language education for children, they also occupied a central place in keeping ethnic heritage.

Given all of this, I would argue that Korean immigrant churches actively engage in transnational religious activities to perform multiple, often contradictory, roles for their congregants. Transnational religious activities through religious organizations vitalize Korean immigrants who are marginalized from the center and overwhelmed by different language, customs, and culture. Even though Korean immigrants physically live in American territory, in many ways, transnational religious beliefs and practices provide practical, emotional, and spiritual identification with people in Korea. As discussed above, multiple transnational religious aspects of the two churches were found from my observations. The worship services, Bible studies, and fellowships all showed their transnationally engaged religious beliefs and practices. Based upon my observation and interviews, I recognized that Korean immigrants and their churches remain absolutely ‘transnational.’

2) Individual Participation in Transnational Religious Activities

In his belief that studies on transnationalism overemphasize the number of transnationally engaged people, Elliott R. Barkan criticizes this excessive concern for transnational activities. According to him, “by the early 1990s, transnationalism had become the term of choice to describe the multi-level, sustained, intensive financial

connections to families and/or communities in the homelands....By 2003-04 a number of scholars at last recognized, or acknowledged, or made the case that transnationalism had been vastly overstated in terms of the numbers maintaining such ties.”¹⁶³ From the standpoint of the number of participants in transnational religious practices, however, my observations and interviews reveal the exact opposite to his argument: Almost all Korean immigrants maintain certain types of transnational religious ties to their homeland and transnational religious beliefs and practices are one of the important means of establishing new lives in a new land.

Besides the participant observation of worship services and informal dialogues with church members, I formally interviewed thirty-two individuals from Grace church and Denver Korean Presbyterian church. Most of the interviewees are first generation Koreans who migrated to the United States as adults (after college) while some came to America to study when they were in their college years. To the initial question of whether they thought they were transnationally engaged, thirty people answered that they kept some of their connections with Korea, and of the rest, two answered negatively to the questions of transnational activities. To measure the degrees and extents of transnational ties, in my interview questions, I used some standards such as language usage, observance of cultural tradition, and the awareness of self-identity. In responses to these questions, I could have detailed knowledge about how they perceived themselves and in what ways and how deeply they actually participated in religious activities across borders.

¹⁶³ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 7-8.

If one of the main standards of assimilation is language acquisition, the use of language is also an important yardstick of transnational connections. According to a survey on “Language Use in the U.S.: 2007” by the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people who use Korean in America has grown by 299 percent for the last 27 years (1980-2007).¹⁶⁴ The significant percentage of Korean language use by Korean immigrants is congruent with the result of my interviews. As to the question of language use at home, only four persons among thirty-two interviewees answered that they use more English than Korean at home to communicate with their children. Whatever levels they were in English fluency, the rest church members admitted that using the Korean language was more convenient and comfortable than speaking in English.

At the same time, most respondents in my study emphasized the eminence of teaching Korean for their descendants. As to the matter of Korean language education for children, Mr. Nam, in his seventies, shared one of his experiences with me:

After coming to America, my wife and I have been so busy working from early morning to late night. We owned a small dry cleaner. As our children began to go to school, they became fluent English speakers like other Americans but they barely speak Korean. Even though they attended Korean language school for a while, they were poor at Korean speaking. We seldom had time to talk with them at home. We just worked for our living all day long for 37 years. One day, when my first daughter was in her college, she blamed my wife and me since we did not push her to study Korean, and cried out that she felt very embarrassed about her being a Korean descent but not speaking Korean. I did not know what to say to her.

As he lamented, besides the necessity of communication with their children, most interviewees claimed that learning the Korean language is not only about gaining knowledge or skill, but also about finding the roots of their identity. In addition, several indicated the effective value of knowing multiple languages in this global world. Mrs.

¹⁶⁴ Hyon B. Shin and Robert A. Kominski, “Language Use in the United States: 2007,” issued April 2010, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acs-12.pdf> (assessed 16 Jun. 2011).

Kim of Denver Korean church insisted:

People spend lots of money to master foreign languages. In contemporary society, those who are bilingual should be valued in job market. In the near future, Korean Americans will have advantage over Americans because of their ability to speak at least two languages.

For these psychological and practical reasons, most respondents advocated for the usage of the Korean language at home and at church.

The use of the Korean language is inseparably bound up with the use of the Korean mass media such as TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, and internet. In my research as well, with the exception of four people (the same people who negatively answered to the use of Korean language at home), the majority said that they watch or read some types of Korean media. To my question of the type and length of the use of the Korean mass media, twenty-one respondents answered that they watch Korean TV programs almost everyday via satellite broadcasting. And seven people said that they watch Korean TVs and movies via internet. The duration of Korean programs watching were varied from one hour to several hours a day. In addition, those who positively answered to the question of the use of the Korean mass media all had experiences of reading Korean newspapers because they can be easily found at Korean markets or restaurants. But reading Korean newspapers were irregular and less frequent than watching Korean TVs. Most interviewees indicated that their use of the internet and TV has increased much more as compared to several years ago. They explained that these are the fastest and most convenient ways of being informed of the recent affairs in Korea.

As to the frequency and degree of involvement in Korean mass media, Rev. Park answered that he watches Korean TV at least 30 minutes a day, reads two to three different Korean newspapers on internet websites a day, and reads around ten Korean

Christian books each month. Noting the frequency of his giving various examples of Korean affairs in his sermons and weekly columns, the large amount of time he spent with the Korean mass media was not surprising at all. Mrs. Kim of Grace church also showed her great exposure to the Korean mass media in her everyday life. She explained:

Working at a pick-up station is very boring. Except busy hours, I watch various Korean soap operas or other programs. I also read Korean newspapers via internet. I fill in the rest of the day reading Korean Christian books borrowed from my church.

As revealed in my interviews, it was evident that more Koreans have an easier and faster access to the Korean mass media than ever before due to the development of modern technology. Of all the types of Korean mass media, I found that purchasing and reading Korean Christian books was one of the common ways that the members of the two congregations kept their ties to Korea and Korean Christians. Because both Grace church and Denver Korean church encouraged their members to read Korean Christian books, the organizational emphasis on reading seemed to promote this type of transnational activity.

This finding is similar to what Levitt's study shows. "Migrants were very much on top of sending country affairs. The majority read ethnic newspapers (73 percent) and watched ethnic movies (72 percent) or television shows (60 percent), sometimes exclusively, but more often in combination with U.S. programming."¹⁶⁵ Ashakant Nimbark also draws a comparable conclusion about the use of ethnic media among Hindu Indians. "More and more people belonging to multilingual ethnicities use their own intracommunity media (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, VCR, and the Internet) to

¹⁶⁵ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 187.

supplement or even substitute for the information they get from the mainstream American media.”¹⁶⁶ In addition, a Korean newspaper displays the obvious transnational engagement of Korean immigrants in the use of mass media. It explains that 84 percent of Korean immigrants use various mass media published or broadcasted in Korean.¹⁶⁷ Like these studies show, it was clear that using ethnic mass media was a crucial part of the church members’ connections with their homeland in their everyday lives.

Besides the use of Korean language and mass media, all interviewees except one person said that they have been to Korea to visit family members and friends, to travel with children, or to travel on business, even though there were big difference in the frequency of travel and length of stay. Among those who have visited Korea, Mr. Chong’s answer was very interesting. He shared:

I have to go to Korea at least one time a year. Even though I do not have many relatives who live in Korea, I just tour by myself. This is the way how I relieve my stress. I am not good at English and, you know, it is not easy to live in a foreign country. With familiar language, food, and people in Korea, I regain strength to endure another year in America.

Among various reasons of visits, it was remarkable to learn that some church members visited Korea for medical service because health care in Korea is much cheaper and more convenient. In addition, the growth of the second generation who wanted to stay in Korea for a while to study, to teach, or to marry was another interesting phenomenon. Several members told me that they used to send their children to Korea to see and recognize their Korean roots. I also heard that one person’s two children were working in

¹⁶⁶ Ashakant Nimbark, “Paradoxes of Media-Reflected Religiosity among Hindu Indians,” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, eds. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 98.

¹⁶⁷ 조진화, 미주중앙일보, http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art_id=861651 (assessed 12 Jun. 2009).

Korea as English teachers. As Korea's economy has been recovering from the 1997 monetary crisis, bilingual Korean immigrants and their descendants could find a job with good working conditions in Korea. Accordingly, most respondents claimed that they saw many immigrants and their children visit Korea much more often than before.

In relation to the development of transportation and the changing conditions of nations, return migration is growing for various reasons such as the economic recession in America, limited opportunity for work in mainstream American society, a rapidly developing Korean economy, and experiences of alienation in a foreign land. During my research, two people from these congregations actually returned to Korea after 26 years and 9 years of stay in America, respectively. Mrs. Cho, a member of Denver Korean Presbyterian church, shared with me before she left:

I am going to return to Korea at the end of December. Because two of my daughters all grew up and are working in other states, I do not have to feel guilty about not staying close to them. After 26 years of living in America, I suddenly felt very lonely. And my mom in Korea has been sick for several years. Even though I have visited Korea two times to see her last year, I finally decided to stay with my mom. As I am getting old, I am missing my home. You may know that later.

Mrs. Kim from Grace church informed me that she would also leave for Korea during the month of February:

I just got a new job in Korea. I believe that this is God's guidance for me and my family. As God has always shown me His way, I am not afraid of any changes in my life. Rather, I am quite excited about this opportunity. My family will start to pack up and travel to California for several weeks of vacation before we finally arrive in Korea. Because I have an American citizenship, I can come back anytime if God wants.

As these two families' cases illustrate, return migration is growing as transportation and technology are getting easier and cheaper to access and use. It was also interesting to

find that the acquisition of U.S. citizenship promotes return migration because it can guarantee re-entry into America.

On the other hand, regarding transnational ties to Korea in terms of finance, the majority that I interviewed shared less information than I expected. In contrast to the huge amount of remittances that many immigrants from Latin America send to their home countries, no one answered that they regularly send money to Korea. According to my question of whether and in what ways they financially support Korean churches or missionaries, they answered that they made a special offering to their churches, and churches assigned the offering to missionaries or other religious organizations. About sending gifts to their family members and friends, most people laughed and shook their heads. As they pointed out, as the world economy becomes more globalized, from Starbucks and McDonalds to Polo Ralph Lauren and Gap, any foreign brand and stores can be found in the metropolitan city of Seoul. Likewise, Korean goods are not too difficult to purchase in America because almost all Korean materials and goods are sold in big cities like Los Angeles and New York. Thus, the members of these churches seldom engaged in transnational exchange of materials and goods.

As for issues of identity, most respondents except three answered that they still considered themselves Koreans regardless of the acquisition of U.S. citizenship and length of residency in America. For Mrs. Chang, a member of Denver Korean Presbyterian church, ethnic identity was not a matter of change even after migration. She said:

We are 'Koreans' living in 'the United States.' That is our identity. Even second or third generations, they are all Koreans too. Whatever the length of stay in this American society is, we cannot be Americans like whites. The majority of America also will not consider Koreans as Americans.

A retired lay elder of Grace church, Mr. Kim, shared with me about his experiences of exclusion from mainstream America and the seemingly forced identity as perpetual aliens in this nation.

About twenty years ago, when our church first opened in this white neighborhood, no one seemed to be unfriendly. Some whites even visited our worship and showed their willingness to help us. But as our congregation grew in number and finance and as our parking lot is filled with Benz and BMW, we felt some kind of animosity from our neighbors. Some complained of the busyness of streets on Sundays and others of noise from church. In this changing atmosphere, our church tried to serve our neighborhood to improve the relationship. On one Sunday night before Thanksgiving, our congregation invited the whole neighborhood to our church to have a big feast with us. We prepared delicious Korean meals for several days. Can you guess what happened? No one appeared. At that time, I just realized that we would not be a part of this neighborhood for good. 'We' could not be 'them.' When we were weak, they were kind enough as 'big brothers.' However, kindness and acceptance are truly different. Being friends and being a younger sibling to be taken care of are also different.

For the majority of interviewees, the experiences of racial discrimination, prejudice, and alienation in this society seemed to be a festering sore that rather reinforced their ethnic identity. Given these stories, it was plausible why most Korean immigrants wanted to gather at Korean churches. All respondents agreed that their congregations have been places for worship, intimate relationships with other ethnic people, social services, and identity formation.

In general, I noted that the members of the two congregations involved transnational religious activities in various types and degrees. While the congregational level of transnational religious connections was more affected by religious leaders or denominations, individual church members could select and decide what they wanted to do with transnational religious connections. This is what Portes means when he argues that "where migration is a more individualized process, grounded on personal and family

decisions, transnational activities are more selective and, at times, exceptional, lacking the normative component attached to them among participants in a political diaspora.”¹⁶⁸ Likewise, along with their specific concerns and needs, church members constantly chose and reformulated their transnational connections among a wide variety of options. Furthermore, I would argue that the transnational religious beliefs and practices of individual church members were everyday transnationalism. That is, though informal and less tightly constructed, the transnational activities of individuals were much wider and deeper than those of organizations, reaching every aspect of their lives. Not only on Sundays but in everyday lives, most church members engaged in transnational religious beliefs and practices. Their lives were truly ‘transnational.’

3) Socio-Political Contexts of Korea

The various aspects of transnational religious activities are inseparably connected to sociopolitical and cultural contexts. As found in my study, the lifestyles and migration patterns of current Korean immigrants are greatly different from several decades ago. The changing notions and rules of nation-states and citizenship foster immigrants to maintain continuous ties with the original country. According to Nancy Foner, “What is striking is the growing number of states of origin that permit their citizens to retain nationality despite naturalization elsewhere. By 2000, 17 of the top 20 sending countries to the United States between 1994 and 1998 allowed some form of dual nationality of citizenship.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Volume 22 no. 2 (1999): 464.

Likewise, in Korea, as of January 1, 2011, a revised Korean Nationality Law went into effect which allows people to keep multiple nationalities. Instead of the term ‘dual’ citizenship, the National Assembly of Korea adopted ‘multiple’ citizenship in order to properly reflect the changing socio-political conditions of Korea such as the increase of multicultural families, the growing number of immigrants from Southeast Asia, and the rise of global mobility. This new law is mostly aimed at elderly Korean immigrants who want to spend the old days in their homeland and the descendants of immigrants who used to choose their citizenship before eighteen.

In this globalized world, on the other hand, politics, economy, and social issues of one country barely remain remote from other parts of the world. Thus, it is more beneficial for sending nations to keep a close relationship with their people abroad. The Korean government also works to retain intimate connections with overseas Koreans by providing favorable conditions in education, job market, health care, and so on. Even though religious transnational links are not formally supported by the government since there is no established religion in Korea, the changing conditions in Korea obviously affect the frequency and density of transnational religious activities among Korean immigrants. The increase of return migration, like the cases of two church members who returned to Korea, may not be irrelevant to the change of Korean national politics and economic conditions.

¹⁶⁹ Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 75.

4) Socio-Political Contexts of America

The majority of Grace and Denver Korean church members reported that they experienced discrimination from the mainstream America because of their physical, linguistic, and cultural differences. Many church members mentioned that they could not help staying within their ethnic churches and communities confronting invisible but strong barriers in American society. They also claimed that transnational religious ties to their homeland provided them with feelings of protection, confidence, and power to resist discriminative situations. The experience of one old member of Grace church was impressive:

When I first came to the United States almost thirty years ago, not many Koreans lived in this area. I purchased a small dry cleaner and started to work there for more than fifteen hours a day. Can you believe it? Because I did not have any knowledge and skill in dry cleaning, it was extremely hard to operate the business. The worst part of owning it was the attitude of white neighborhood. Some whites attempted to trump up charges on the slightest pretext. They considered me an idiot. Because of my short English and lack of knowledge of American society, I suffered a heavy loss. Whenever I had that kind of bad experiences, I read the Bible which my pastor in Korea gave to me when left for America. That helped me a lot.

This is similar to the study of Portes. According to him, “When, by the reason of its racial features and culture, a foreign group is uniformly rejected and confined to a permanently inferior status,....there is no recourse but to draw a protective boundary around the group, identifying it with tradition and interests rooted in the home country and separating it symbolically and, at times, physically, from the host society.”¹⁷⁰

Participating in transnational religious activities, those who experienced strong rejection from the host society found comfortable foundation to recover healthy self-images.

¹⁷⁰ Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Volume 22 no. 2 (1999): 465.

Ironically, while the changes in politics, laws, and the social atmosphere in Korea positively encourage Korean immigrants to maintain certain connections with their homeland, the general attitudes of mainstream America toward newcomers act as negative incentives to build up transnational ties. As stated before, the processes of migration and settlement of the new immigrants are quite different from those of earlier European immigrants. Though much more implicit and indirect than before, the subtlety of racial category still resides in the whole American society in a different form.

The experiences of discrimination of most members of the two congregations are consistent with what scholars have written about the American society where ethnic minorities are racially and ethnically categorized. Howard Winant affirms, “A new racial politics developed in the United States; racial hegemony replaced racial domination.”¹⁷¹ He goes on to explain that “white supremacy had been wounded, but not mortally. It had again proven itself quite capable of metamorphosis: absorbing and adapting much of the ‘dream,’ and repackaging itself as ‘color-blind,’ pluralist, nonracialist, and meritocratic.”¹⁷² In this situation, “Whatever the class background or nation-state of origin of migrants of color who enter the United States, they come as subordinated people. This political and economic subordination is a process that continues to structure all aspects of their experience in the United States.”¹⁷³ Given this persistent presence of discrimination and prejudice, maintaining transnational activities is a reactive product of

¹⁷¹ Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 21.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷³ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, 234.

Korean immigrants to their experiences of subordination by the dominant class of their new country. “The experience of migrating to a country where hegemonic racial constructions locate them in a disadvantaged position certainly contributes to people retaining ties and identities associated with their home countries and communities, as these offer a refuge from U.S. racialization.”¹⁷⁴

To help contextualize the values and meanings of their churches in the alienated and marginalized life in America, I asked interviewees what their churches meant for them. Many of them answered that their congregations were the only safe places where they could find self-confidence and a sense of acceptance. Others compared their churches to their hometowns or homes where they were always relaxed and comfortable. This is exactly how Sang Hyun Lee explains about Korean churches for Korean immigrants. “Asian American pilgrims, like all mortal humans, need a hospitable structure for belonging. We need a home. And as many people know, in the Korean American community, it is the ethnic church, more than any other institution that has played the greatest role in meeting this need for belonging. The church is the home, or at least a home away from home, for many Asian immigrants and their succeeding generations.”¹⁷⁵ For the church members in my study, their congregations were spiritual and communal shelters which safeguarded them from attacks and harm. The experience of Mrs. Park from Grace church demonstrated the need of a sense of belonging in a foreign nation:

¹⁷⁴ Luin Goldring, “Power and Status in Transnational Social Spaces,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 166.

¹⁷⁵ Sang Hyun Lee, “Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology,” in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, ed. David K. Yoo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 224.

I have been to several Anglo churches. But always I felt that I was a visitor not a member. Even though some members of these churches tried to be kind to me, their questions were all the same. “Where are you from?” “Oh, your English is very good.” That was it. I did not feel that I could belong to this faith community. I am really tired of struggling with white Americans who barely allowed me to intrude into their areas. I need my own safe space. That is my church.

The overall picture that emerges for the two churches is that the unfavorable atmosphere of mainstream America has a deep influence on the development of transnational religious connections as one of the tactics to survive. After migration, Korean immigrants encounter serious problems in terms of the language barrier, cultural differences, and different ways of life. In times when they feel feeble and vulnerable, transnational religious links can be a strategy to survive and thrive. “To be forced to migrate from your home with the dream of a better life, to confront difficult economic conditions and racism instead of a world of prosperity and security, and to map out transnational connections as a strategy of personal and cultural survival is to enter a realm not totally penetrated by dominant ideas and practices.”¹⁷⁶ In the same manner, the members of Grace and Denver Korean church strived to participate in transnational religious activities for their prosperity as well as survival in a land where the social atmosphere is often unfriendly and unwelcome.

¹⁷⁶ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 97.

3. Implications of Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants

In my study of the two churches and their members, I discovered several implications of transnational religious beliefs and practices. First of all, transnational activities vary among churches and individuals. Compared to the well-organized and systemized transnational religious connections of Grace church, Denver Korean Presbyterian church did not have enough resources to build sustainable transnational religious activities. The absence of a senior pastor, various conflicts among lay leaders, and financial deficiency all prohibited the church from developing certain types of transnational religious connections. Yet, the scope and duration of involving transnational religious activities were more diverse among individual church members. While some interviewees answered that they have lived with highly centered transnational connections, others mentioned that they participated in transnational activities from time to time.

Secondly, from the experiences of interviewees of the two churches, it was obvious that transnational religious ties have greatly impacted themselves, their religious organizations, and both societies involved. Even though some transnational practices looked minor, it made a big difference in their everyday lives. The studies on transnational activities include different perspectives and arguments on the importance of such ties. Some scholars minimize the presence and repercussion of transnational connections, and others doubt their enduring impact upon immigrants and their children. Yet, based upon my research, it is true that “transnational activities must be in the interest of those that engage in them since, otherwise, they would not invest the considerable time

and effort required.”¹⁷⁷ Transnational religious activities occupied a significant portion of the lives of many church members in the two congregations.

Furthermore, I learned that maintaining transnational ties was a wise and advantageous choice of those who live in a multilayered world. As it is inevitable for the economy, politics, and culture of one country to be affected by those of other nations, the life of an immigrant is also not segregated from the rest of the world and is greatly affected by global occurrences. In this 21st century, no one really can live without being influenced by other parts of the world. Therefore, even though transnational connections are sometimes the reactive choices for protection, safety, and survival to subordination and marginalization, they can also be active choices of grasping better opportunities. As one of the church member of Grace indicated, engaging in transnational religious activities offered more options for his life in a new country. Mr. Kim shared:

I started my own business after migrating to the United States. Before, I was just an employee in Korea. Now I have a small motel near Rocky Mountain national park. In America, I could develop my business sense and have tried to connect my motel with tour groups from Korea. Paying attention to what was happening in the world was helpful to open my eyes to see the possibility of making a good profit and starting a new type of business.

That is, for some church members, keeping transnational connections provided more opportunities for a better life in this fast changing society.

Besides the amount of money, materials, and goods exchanged between the sending and receiving countries, however, as I noted before, a more significant implication of transnational religious activities lies in the formation of identity, morality, and meanings of life. “Faith, directly or indirectly, permeates the lives of many people. For some, it is the sole basis around which they define who they are. For others, it is one thread among

¹⁷⁷ Alejandro Portes, 469.

many that affects what they care about. Either way, religion influences what positions people take, what they decide to do about them, and who their potential partners are.”¹⁷⁸

For mobile people, transnational religious practices affect the ways they understand themselves who are uprooted from the original place and transplanted to a different soil. Likewise, for the members of the two churches showed their tendency to see themselves as God’s blessed people who were directed by God’s Will to this nation. This belief gave them confidence in and comfort from the hardships of living in a foreign country.

I also realized that Korean immigrants in my case study congregations could recover social recognition which they lost on the downward path after migration to the United States. Generally, Korean men who used to enjoy the benefits of Confucian morality and hierarchical relations feel the loss of their rights. Working at small businesses for more than twelve hours a day and confronting a lowered position at home, they are eager to get back their reputation as the head of organizations. Thus, in many cases, aspirations to become a leader in their congregations can cause serious conflict and schism in Korean churches. This was the main reason for Denver Korean church’s serious problem. Participating in transnational religious activities of their churches, many Korean men could display their power and be recognized as a prominent person in other places. The study of Basch et al. contains this kind of operation of transnational practices for immigrants:

Transnational organizational practices provide another vehicle for individual transmigrants to obtain and reinforce their social position. Joining, and even more significantly leading, such transnational organizations provide migrants with a chance for public validation and recognition both within the United States and in their country of origin. Such status validation becomes a high priority for the many immigrants who, through migration to the United States, have achieved a higher

¹⁷⁸ Peggy Levitt, 91.

standard of living, but only by accepting lower status positions within the United States and withstanding the daily assaults of racism.¹⁷⁹

Like their argument, retaining transnational religious ties was helpful for some church members who struggled with meaninglessness and self-depreciation after migration.

In another sense, I recognized that transnational religious ties have a liberating effect on immigrants. Mrs. Kang in her sixties explains:

In my church, I can be a whole person. Even though Americans rarely reveal their antipathy towards newcomers, they neither want to accept foreigners to their boundaries. I don't think I can overcome the limitation as a minority person. In this situation, Korean church is a place where I can worship in my language and I can make friends with other Koreans. It is a place where I can freely breathe.

As she expressed, after migration, most immigrants feel that they are bound within a racialized society and marginalized to the edge of American society. Since race still exerts enormous power over the whole structure of America, most new immigrants who have a different color skin and physical appearance encounter various prejudices and discrimination. Given this unexpected obstacle, many immigrants strive to involve themselves in transnational religious activities for self-esteem and self-confidence. These transnational religious beliefs and practices help immigrants feel liberated from the suppression of the stratified society. Participating in transnational religious rituals and other activities, the members of the two churches seemed to be at least temporarily liberated from the burdens of life and social biases.

In the meantime, studying the transnational religious lives of the two congregations and their members proposed more proper understandings of changing notions of migration, allegiance to a country, and international politics. Due to the process of globalization and the unprecedented development in technology and transportation,

¹⁷⁹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 249.

geographic distance shrinks. The number of international or transnational migrants increases, and the relations of migrants to the original and the destination country becomes multiple. Although no one explicitly mentioned the complex relations of their lives and national or international politics and economics, observing and interviewing actual Korean immigrants helped me see them. That is, exploring how Korean immigrants and their churches develop and maintain transnational religious connections presented new thoughts and insights about the complex webs of interconnectedness in the world. This finding is consistent with the study of Leonard et al. “An emphasis on transnational religious networks offers new insights on the ways in which religious beliefs and practices relate to migration and civic life in both old and new homelands.”¹⁸⁰

Finally, one of my findings is that the study of relations between transnational religious activities and assimilation needs deeper investigation. Some scholars attempt to explain this relationship in their studies. According to Karen Fog Olwig, “Transnational theory has contributed to our understanding of migration by pointing to the inadequacy of investigating population movements in terms of one-way movements that result in the gradual integration of migrants into the receiving country.”¹⁸¹ Portes contends that transnational connections actually foster assimilation contrary to the conventional idea that transnational activities impede assimilation. “Instead of being a denationalizing force conspiring against the integrity of the host society, transnational activities can actually facilitate successful adaptation by providing opportunities for economic mobility

¹⁸⁰ Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Jennifer Holdaway, eds., *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 4.

¹⁸¹ Karen Fog Olwig, “Transnational” Socio-Cultural Systems and Ethnographic Research: Views from an Extended Field Site,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 3 (2003): 787.

and for a vital and purposeful group life.”¹⁸² Yet, previous studies mostly ignore the role of religion in building transnational connections. From transnational religious perspective, does Portes’ conclusion properly reflect current relations of transnational ties with assimilation? Can transnational religious activities and assimilation occur coincidentally? Given the emerging transnational religious beliefs and practices, how can be the term assimilation defined in the 21st century? Based upon the experiences of Korean immigrants in the two case study congregations, in the next chapter, I will explore the complex relations between transnational religious connections and assimilation.

¹⁸² Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities,” 472.

V: Rethinking Assimilation through the Lens of Transnational Religion

1. The Need to Rethink Assimilation from a Transnational Perspective

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is obvious that current Korean immigrants are under the influence of the radically changing world order that is inseparable from activities across the borders of nation-states. Most members of my two case study congregations show their pervasive engagement in transnational religious practices. Given their distinctive experiences, now, I will turn to the question of how those who participate in transnational religious activities assimilate to American society. Are Korean immigrants slow to assimilate to the host nation because of their constant ties to their homeland? Do their transnational religious connections hinder them from assimilating to American society? If the traditional notions of assimilation need to be questioned and revisited to properly reflect the lives of Korean immigrants, then, what can be the alternative understandings of assimilation in contemporary global society? In this chapter, comparing and contrasting the transnational religious experiences of Korean immigrants and their churches with the existing studies, I will rethink and rebuild the meaning of assimilation.

As seen from the cases of Korean immigrants, the experiences of the new immigrants are different from European immigrants because of their race and ethnicity. Thus, it is no wonder that the process of assimilation of Korean immigrants is also distinctive from that of European immigrants. Besides issues of race and ethnicity, in this

global world, a new phenomenon of transnationalism appears and adds more complexity to understand the process of assimilation. The unprecedented development of technology, transportation, and global networks help immigrants connect with their home country more easily and frequently. Consequently, they bring up the questions of whether and how transnationally engaged Korean immigrants assimilate to American society.

Despite these changing factors, many contemporary scholars still endeavor to explain assimilation based upon traditional ideas. According to Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Assimilation is by its nature a multigenerational process....It is only with the U.S.-born, or the foreign-born who immigrate at an early age and are raised mostly in the United States, that there is any possibility of assessing the true prospects for the assimilation of immigrant groups.”¹⁸³ As they state, their understanding of assimilation is grounded upon the conventional idea that assimilation means a final destination, not a process or spectrum. Kivisto, illustrating the rapidly occurring assimilation of Jews as they give up their “exclusionary practices,” affirms that “[a]ssimilation is not an inevitable process, but it is a powerful one.”¹⁸⁴ From his perspective, assimilation wields its power over immigrant groups, forcing them to discard their ethnic and religious traditions. New theories and ideas have appeared, attempting to reflect the experiences of the new immigrants’ assimilation such as “a segmented assimilation.” However, they still assume that there are separate stages or courses of assimilation like the traditional ideas of assimilation. That is, assimilation is often understood as “a series of interrelated

¹⁸³ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 215.

¹⁸⁴ Peter Kivisto, “Social Spaces, Transnational Immigrant Communities, and the Politics of Incorporation,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 313.

cultural (acculturation), structural (integration), and psychological (identification) process.”¹⁸⁵

The arguments of these scholars are quite different from my own findings in this study. Although scholars strive to design different terms to indicate the distinct phases of assimilation such as acculturation, adaptation, integration, and incorporation, I found that the actual occurrence of assimilation cannot be broken down into discrete steps. The complexity and interconnection of Korean immigrants’ lives are hardly restricted within designated boundaries. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to understand assimilation as occurring over every stage of Korean immigrants’ exposure to and interaction with the wider society. In particular, the emergence of transnational activities promotes Korean immigrants to choose and follow the most profitable aspect of American society, without entirely submitting to the irresistible forces of assimilation to mainstream America. Most members of the two churches show their tendency to select among many options of keeping Korean heritage and emulating American ways of life. Rather than following definite steps to the final destination to be a full American, Korean immigrants actively participate in transnational religious activities while they also learn new things from the host society.

In another aspect, my study also reveals the need to rethink assimilation from a transnational perspective. In fact, the traditional notion of assimilation arises from the unrealistic picture of the host society. It fabricates the fictional scene of the receiving community as single and homogeneous. Glick Schiller et al. argue that “[k]ey to nation-

¹⁸⁵ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Melting and the Pot: Assimilation and Variety in American Life,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Peter Kivisto (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 166.

state building as a political process has been the construction of a myth that each nation-state contained within it a single people defined by their residence in a common territory, their undivided loyalty to a common government, and their shared cultural heritage.”¹⁸⁶

Unlike the political and social propaganda, it is important to acknowledge that American society is not homogeneous at all. It is rather extremely diverse in terms of racial and ethnic identity, socioeconomic situation, spatial occupancy, and cultural observance.

As many Korean immigrants in my study mentioned, the United States is comprised of diverse racial and ethnic groups of people along with different cultural practices. As to the question of what might be the so-called American culture to which immigrants assimilate, Mr. Kim of Grace church answered as follows:

I imagined American culture as what I saw from the Hollywood movies. But that was not like that. Frankly speaking, I am not sure what is really American. For example, if we think food, all international dishes can be seen in so many restaurants and markets in this country.

As he said, it is rather imaginary to assume the culture of Anglo-Saxon-Protestant whites as a center and standard of the whole nation to which newcomers assimilate. This finding corresponds to Peter Kivisto’s argument when he explains:

Discourses on assimilation as a fact and as an ideal are often intermingled, so that what is in fact the case and what might or might not be desired are difficult to analytically distinguish....Likewise, there is a need to understand what it is that newcomers are presumably assimilating into, what genuine options they have, and what their varied impacts actually are on the respective receiving nations.¹⁸⁷

From a transnational view, there is no longer pure and absolute white American culture.

¹⁸⁶ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 79.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Kivisto, ed., *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 4.

Rather, as the transnational religious beliefs and practices of Korean immigrants and their churches illustrate, many aspects of American society are mixed with multiple factors from different places.

Moreover, my study questions the traditional concept of assimilation which sets up two contrast groups without considering the essential differences within a group. While it is clear that there is a huge gap between immigrants and the native-citizens of America, it is also true that there are crucial differences among Korean immigrants. In line with various factors such as length of stay, education level, language skill, and personal interests, the assimilation of Korean immigrants and their children occurs to different extents in specific contexts. Especially, in a global world, the process of assimilation does not really match up with the everyday lives of Korean immigrants. Rather, how Korean immigrants perceive their learning of a new country is closely related to their unique stories, transnational connections, and specific life conditions. Thus, it is not proper to simply suppose assimilation as the identical process that most Korean immigrants follow at a similar speed.

As explained above, the finding that Korean immigrants and their churches are transnationally engaged urges us to rethink the traditional meaning of assimilation. It also questions in what ways and to what extent the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants affect the process of assimilation. More basically, it is questionable whether transnational activities and assimilation are competing or complementary. The traditional idea generally holds that transnational connections impede the assimilation of newcomers. Because of their suspicion of transnationally active immigrants as disloyal and opportunistic, many Americans are easily shackled by this misleading opinion. Yet, I

realized that this common idea rarely reflects the current trends of migration and the lives of Korean immigrants in today's American society.

2. The Misunderstandings of Transnational Activities and Assimilation

Given the emerging transnational activities of the new immigrants, there are several misleading concepts, especially in relation to assimilation. I would deal with some common misconceptions. One of the misunderstandings of transnational activities and assimilation is about their duration and frequency in the lives of immigrants. Some people tend to minimize the efficacy and implication of these connections. They think that keeping transnational ties to their original countries is a passing phenomenon which does not last long. From this perspective, the transnational life of an immigrant diminishes as time goes by, and will be finally transformed into ordinary American life. However, most Korean immigrants in my study admitted that the access to and frequency of transnational involvement rather increases in accordance with the development of technology and global networks. Their churches also keep providing many aspects of transnational religious beliefs and practices for their members. They have been transnational for over thirty or forty years and become more transnationally active. This obvious fact disproves the argument that transnational engagement is just transient and will diminish as assimilation occurs.

There is another misunderstanding of transnational activities and assimilation which insists that that only a handful of immigrants engage in transnational activities. It believes that most immigrants are willing to assimilate to mainstream America while a small number of newcomers stay in their ethnic enclaves. From this perspective, Foner

asserts, “If many academic observers who studied earlier immigrants were guilty of overlooking transnational ties in the quest to document assimilation, there is now a risk of overemphasizing the centrality of transnationalism and minimizing the extent to which immigrants ‘become American’ and undergo changes in behavior and outlook in response to circumstances in this country.”¹⁸⁸ Unlike her argument, almost all Korean immigrants and Korean immigrant churches develop and maintain some types of transnational connections. Regardless of their length of stay and level of learning a new society, the number of transnationally engaged Korean immigrants is very high and thus the impact of transnational religious practices upon their everyday lives is also significant.

My study also challenges a common misunderstanding that the immigrants who develop and maintain transnational ties to their homelands have a negative influence on the host society. The actions of constant homeland affiliation pose questions of the allegiance and loyalty of immigrants to the United States. While assimilating immigrants look faithful and trustworthy, transnationally active immigrants do not seem to be devoted to the affairs of the United States. Given the traditional notion of nation-states as separate and bounded, it is no wonder that transnational immigrants live in-between several nations are suspected of whether they are potential patriots or traitors.

The fact that an increasing number of nations issues dual or multiple citizenships to people abroad may make Americans more anxious about the national interests of the United States. Under the legal protection of the sending countries, it is suspected that immigrants enhance the economic or political conditions of their homelands while subtracting a considerable amount of national resources of the United States.

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 85.

Overlapping with the distrust of and antipathy towards foreigners after terrorist attacks and continued economic recession in the United States, transnational connections are not genuinely welcomed from the majority of Americans. However, many Korean immigrants mentioned the positive roles of transnational religious connections such as the restoration of confidence, a better avenue of information, and a means of relieving stress to live well in a foreign nation. More importantly, it is necessary to reexamine the meanings of nation-states and citizenships in accordance with changing world order.

One of the common and serious misconceptions of transnational activities originates from a view that keeping transnational connections repudiates and disturbs assimilation. Whenever the topic of transnational activities appears, a binary position of either/or is set up: either ethnic retention or assimilation. Many Americans assume that if more and more immigrants simultaneously sustain some types of connections with the original nation and the host society, these transnational connections may slow down the process of assimilation and finally disturb the solidarity of American society. As Portes argues, “As the rise of a transnational field linking countries of origin and destination become better known through journalistic reports and daily contacts, voices are bound to emerge denouncing these activities as a threat to the cultural and political integrity of the host nation, creating ‘fifth-columns’ of foreigners uninterested in integrating themselves into society’s mainstream.”¹⁸⁹ In the face of the existence and the viability of transnational activities, therefore, anxiety and fear increase among the majority of American society.

¹⁸⁹ Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Volume 22 no. 2 (1999): 468.

In contrast to this general idea, most Korean immigrants of the two churches reveal that transnational religious activities and assimilation can occur simultaneously. They learn about the new society while keeping ties to their homeland at the same time. Thus, it is not an either/or issue but a both/and phenomena. In my study, I did not see any polarization between those who successfully assimilate into mainstream America and others who remain at the margin with constant contacts with their homelands. Rather, all interviewees have many different stories of how they involve transnational religious activities and how they assimilate to American society. The image of a bipolar relation between assimilation and transnational connections seldom reflects the reality of Korean immigrants' lives in my two case study congregations.

3. The Features of Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants

To reduce the misunderstandings of and provide new insights to the relations between transnational activities and assimilation, now, I will explore their actual relevance. For a better grasp of the ambiguous term assimilation, it is helpful and meaningful to preferentially notice how Korean immigrants use their transnational connections. Based upon the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants and their churches, several features of transnational connections can be recognized in terms of negotiation and recreation, selection, and combination. These characteristics of Korean immigrants' transnational religious activities will help to rethink the existing understandings of transnational activities and assimilation.

1) Negotiation and Recreation

The various types of transnational activities of Korean immigrants reveal their negotiating and recreating capability. In the process of building and keeping connections across borders, Korean immigrants play an important role as active agents, not as passive recipients. With the help of other Koreans and their churches, each person tends to negotiate various factors to find what is well fitting to their needs and purposes. Actively interacting and exchanging through various transnational connections, Korean immigrants show their creative energy which maximizes benefits from what is given to them. Accordingly, the religious beliefs, rituals, and symbols Korean immigrants and their churches bring from their own country undergo a period of negotiation in the distinctive contexts of the United States.

The Christian faith that Korean immigrants brought to the United States was initially delivered by American missionaries a hundred years ago. Since that time, however, the Christian beliefs and practices of Koreans rarely remain the same as the teachings of initial foreign missionaries, instead developing relevant styles to the unique Korean contexts. Again, in the process of reproduction in the United States, Korean immigrants' Christian faith becomes identical neither with American Christianity nor with Christian faith in Korea. It is the outcome of creative transformation of what they encounter in a new place of living. To satisfy their specific needs and concerns, Korean immigrants and their congregations always attempt to invent the most fitting religious identities and practices for themselves.

One of the examples of inventive religious practices is found at Grace church. In Korea, churches organize small group bible studies (구역예배, 속회) in accordance with gender, age, and residency. The members gather together every week primarily to study the Bible over light snacks. In the United States, this type of gathering develops into a different character. Whatever the names are, the small group meetings for the church members of Grace are places where they share their everyday lives. Unlike married couples in the system of most churches in Korea, here, married couples generally belong to the same group. In addition, sharing dinner together is an important part of making intimate relationships. In a foreign country where family members and close friends are hard to meet, church members through these small group meetings are not only religious companions but also neighbors, friends, and even kin members. To emphasize this character, Grace church calls these small group meetings ‘home churches’ where members strengthen their faith and close relationships. One of the leaders of these small groups, Mr. Kim, shares the importance of belonging to these groups:

In Anglo churches, I heard that most church members disappear within ten minutes after worship. Some church members can chat over coffee but topics are just about weather, season, or sales. I believe that Korean immigrant churches are different from them. We are also different from churches in Korea. We exist for worship, fellowship, service, and support. We are more than churches. As our pastor always says, we are a home for lonely Korean immigrants in this nation.

As he explains, the creation and recreation of religious beliefs and practices through transnational networks is constantly occurring in Korean immigrant churches.

The Korean immigrants’ strategy of negotiating and recreating is consistent with the studies of several scholars. In their study of African American churches, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya notice that “[a] qualitatively different cultural form of

expressing Christianity is found in most black churches, regardless of denomination.”¹⁹⁰

In the study on Mayan Religion in American soil, Nancy J. Wellmeier also illustrates Mayans’ effort to reformulate their religious life in accordance with changing contexts.

“Maya Catholic priests have reevaluated their ancestral religious practices and found many of them compatible with Christianity; they are beginning an effort to reindigenize

Catholicism, opting to resume the inculturation process interrupted by the American

missionaries.”¹⁹¹ Instead of abandoning their old faith in the process of assimilation,

recent immigrants are recreating worships and rituals pertinent to a new environment.

Similarly, Filipino immigrants show how they invent their own beliefs and practices, after being exposed to several places of living.

Originating from a country with a long history of Christianity and faith-based organizing, Filipino immigrants have transformed vacated church spaces and places into sanctuaries for incorporation and acculturation rooted in Filipinized cultural traits, norms, beliefs, exchanges, interactions, and iconography. With the ‘blessings’ of their churches, they have formed cultural groups and networks that simultaneously maintain transnational linkages and local social power centers.¹⁹²

As the above studies reveal, this creative capability to live well in-connection is one of the characteristics of Korean immigrants’ transnational religious activities.

¹⁹⁰ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 7.

¹⁹¹ Nancy J. Wellmeier, “Santa Eulalia’s People in Exile: Maya Religion, Culture, and Identity in Los Angeles,” in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, eds. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 106.

¹⁹² Joaquin L. Gonzalez III and Andrea Maison, “We Do Not Bowl Alone: Social and Cultural Capital from Filipinos and Their Churches,” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, eds. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 357.

2) Selection

Among Korean immigrants of the two churches, it is not uncommon to find that they select and choose out of a wide variety of goods, services, ideas, and programs from both their homeland and the host society. Instead of assimilating to every aspect of American society or keeping all Korean traditions, they want to select the best among many options. For example, many Korean immigrants believe that Korean traditions are preferable in some aspects of life while American cultures and social structures are better in other areas. Thus, while they attempt to instill the vertical relations of Confucian morality into their children in terms of filial piety or respect for the elderly, in other times, they emphasize American-style morality such as independence and equality. Thus, as to the questions of the aspects of their ethnic retention and assimilation, the answers of interviewees are often inconsistent and even contradictory. This is similar to what Levitt and her colleagues find in their study. They insist, “Most of the individuals...participate in selective transnational practices as well as selective assimilation into their host societies.”¹⁹³ Through choosing and selecting among many alternatives, Korean immigrants assimilate to American society and retain their ethnic traditions at the same time.

In the same manner, the two congregations are “following beliefs and practices that sometimes help to change and incorporate immigrants and sometimes work to preserve ethnic identities and/or resist an American identity.”¹⁹⁴ At Grace church, every Friday

¹⁹³ Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, “International Perspectives on Transnational Migration: An Introduction,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 3 (2003): 570.

night, Korean children and youths attend the AWANA program, which was originally developed by the Chicago-area evangelicals, while they go to a Korean language and culture class every Saturday morning. While the women's council holds a Korean Food Bazaar to serve low-income Koreans in the Denver area, the youth group participates in the National Fasting Day of World Vision to support starving African children. After the first Korean worship service, congregants share coffee and bagels, but Sunday lunch always consists of traditional Korean dishes.

This is also true for the case of the Denver Korean Presbyterian church. The church belongs to both the Korean Pastors' Association and the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). Accordingly, to appoint a new pastor, the committee actively contacts Korean pastors in other states of America or in Korea through Korean networks while observing the denominational rules and principles. On Thanksgiving Day, the whole church celebrates the holiday with traditional American dishes with turkey, ham, yams, and cranberry jelly. Yet, on New Year's Day, it shares a traditional Korean meal with rice cake soup, and teaches children and youths how to bow to their grandparents for New Years. From these illustrations, it is evident that Korean immigrants and their children simultaneously involve both transnational activities and assimilation to the host society by their choice and selection.

3) Combination

Another finding of my study is that the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants consist of the process of mixture and combination. Apart from selecting one

¹⁹⁴ Karen I. Leonard et al., eds., *Immigrants Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 7.

aspect among multiple options and making it stand out, the process of combination often produces a hybrid form. Several scholars explain how immigrants combine many aspects to yield a new product. In his study of Latino's religious activities, Manuel A. Vásquez emphasizes the syncretic and embodied character of the new immigrants' religious engagement. "[I]t is precisely the grassroots devotions, the syncretic rituals and beliefs that transgress the sacred-profane dichotomy, and the embodied and 'emplaced' (in the sense of simultaneously creating and reflecting lived space) religious tropes, myths, and narratives that migrants perform in their day-to-day existence as they attempt to negotiate the perils of life in both their adopted country and the country of origin."¹⁹⁵ Kivisto also shows that transnational activities are significant for immigrants to form a more fluid and dynamic identity and community in a foreign nation. According to him, "migrants in transnational spaces are seen as being engaged in a more fluid and syncretistic process of adaptation. In other words, transnational migrants forge their sense of identity and their community, not out of a loss of mere replication, but as something that is at once new and familiar – a *bricolage* constructed of cultural elements from both the homeland and the receiving nation."¹⁹⁶

Likewise, it is evident that the two churches and Korean immigrants mix and combine different elements into a new form whatever the names are. But I noted how to and what to combine really matter in the making and remaking of unique religious beliefs and practices. In other words, the combination of distinctive factors into a new

¹⁹⁵ Manuel A. Vásquez, "Historicizing and Materializing the Study of Religion: The Contribution of Migration Studies," in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard et.al. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 222.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Kivisto, "Theorizing Transnational Immigration: A Critical Review of Current Efforts," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Volume 24 no.4 (2001):568.

production can be either promising or frustrating. The poor combination of two different elements is easily found in Korean immigrant churches. In particular, the merging of the church's role as a religious organization with social services often breeds strange conditions in Korean immigrant churches. Even though Korean immigrants want their churches to be a place for faithful discipleship, in many cases, they remain demanding and selfish. Due to cultural and linguistic differences, Korean immigrants feel that they are alienated from the mainstream American society and, thus, want to find a place where they can have an intimate relationship with co-ethnics and recover social recognition that is lost after migration. Instead of widening their perspectives toward the wider society, they want to stay within a comfortable niche just to console their tired souls and bodies. Accordingly, they often insist that their own needs and concerns should be answered first before they can do something for others and communities. This attitude triggers frequent conflicts between Korean pastors and church members and among church members as found in the case of Denver Korean Presbyterian church.

Furthermore, the outcome of mixing different elements sometimes turns out to be strange and bizarre while its original intention is to build a better construction with materials from both the sending and receiving societies. As to this peculiar position of Korean immigrant churches, one member of Denver Korean church, Mrs. Nam, shared with me:

I think the primary purpose of immigrant churches must be preaching and teaching God's Words. But so many Korean immigrants demand secular things to pastors such as translation, transportation, and even babysitting. Sometimes they call pastors when they move. Is this right? Can pastors handle so many different jobs within a limited time? No. They must focus on their original ministry instead of attempting to attract Koreans by satisfying their secular needs.

As she lamented, while the combination of religious and social functions results from the

urgent need to satisfy the special requests of Korean immigrants, it also produces a detrimental effect on Korean immigrants. Therefore, combining several elements without considering contexts is often only good in name, generating odd mixtures.

Despite occasional failures as a result of bad combination, however, it is obvious that Korean immigrants tend to keep combining several elements to build a safer haven for survival and prosperity in a new land. This is why Levitt affirms that “[i]ncreasing numbers of newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on their homelands but will continue to craft some combination of the two.”¹⁹⁷ Korean immigrants and the two churches in my study develop and maintain transnational religious activities, continuously supplying materials, goods, ideas, and programs and mixing different components from two or more countries.

4) Issues of Identity

When dealing with transnational religious activities, one of the significant issues is identity. Like the traditional concept of assimilation, the identity of immigrants is generally understood in a dichotomy. From this perspective, immigrants must choose to be either ethnic minorities or the majority of American society. Moreover, it is traditionally assumed that the formation of identity originates in a single and fixed way. However, I recognized that Korean immigrants’ identities can be changed in accordance with different conditions. Especially, in contemporary society where Korean immigrants maintain multiple ties to their original country, identity is not a permanent label attached to them but a different name determined by their choice.

¹⁹⁷ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 24-25.

Given challenges to the traditional notions of assimilation and emerging transnational connections, many scholars attempt to develop germane answers to the question of identity of the new immigrants. Among them, Alex Stepick adopts “flexible identities” to illustrate how immigrants create their alternative identity in accordance with specific contexts. “Flexible identities refer to individuals emphasizing some aspects of their cultural heritage in one context, but different aspects in another. Given that most immigrants are religious, the question is not if they have a religious identity, but how their religion articulates with alternative identities, with homeland versus adopted country, national versus ethnic identities.”¹⁹⁸ Because of their situations in-between and in-connection, it is plausible that immigrants emphasize different aspects of their identity in different conditions. Meanwhile, compared to Fenggang Yang’s study of immigrants’ identity as “adhesive,” Elaine Howard Ecklund stresses that the identity of newcomers is “protean” that is varied and ever-changing. She argues that “civic identity for Korean Americans...is better described as what the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton calls ‘protean’ - fluid and overlapping.”¹⁹⁹ As she finds, for most current immigrants, identity is not fixed and permanent but dynamic and variable.

The above explanations of immigrants’ identity can also be applied to the case of Korean immigrants and their descendants. Like water in different shapes of containers, the identity of Korean immigrants in different situations is changing from Korean or Korean American or American to other types. From their Christian faith, some Korean

¹⁹⁸ Alex Stepick, “God is Apparently Not Dead: The Obvious, the Emergent, and the Still Unknown in Immigration and Religion,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard et al. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁹⁹ Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models for Civic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88.

immigrants, especially descendants of immigrants, may emphasize their religious identity on top of ethnic identities. In any case, Korean immigrants in my study look comfortable when they answer the questions of identity. It seemed to me that they are apt to emphasize a certain identity over other identities in different contexts.

During the interviews of thirty-two individuals from the two churches, one of the questions was about the self-awareness of their primary identity. Among them, three persons recognized themselves as Americans. And one person revealed his self-awareness as a cosmopolitan who belongs to the world, not in a separate nation-state. The other twenty eight people declared with one accord that they are primarily Koreans. The interesting fact was that no one answered this question with their religious identity. Because respondents were all first generation immigrants who have clear memories of Korea, they showed a tendency to see themselves as ethnically distinguished people from the majority of Americans.

However, their identity awareness was likely to change in accordance with many different situations. Mrs. Park from Grace church shared with me her recognition of her identity:

I am a Korean by blood but an American by law. Even though I have lived in this country for more than thirty years and received an American citizenship, my blood in veins cannot be changed.

Another man, one of the lay leaders of Grace church, explained his self-awareness of identity as follows:

I think I have to answer that I am still a Korean. But I also think that I am in the process of being an American. If I live longer in America, someday, I will become more like an American.

Like them, most respondents indicated their ethnic identity as a primary one as being

open to the flexible nature of identity. Korean identity is like a root from which other identities can grow.

Some of them shared that the formation of identity was heavily influenced by the attitude of the host society. Mrs. Kim made an interesting statement regarding Korean immigrants' identity formation:

We don't have to struggle with identity because American society already defines who we are. From their views, we are just Asians or Chinese altogether.

As she commented, for many Korean immigrants, the self-understanding of identity and designated identity by others are not always the same. It is often hard to request that the majority of Americans see Korean immigrants as a part of Americans. As seen in my study, with the help of transnational connections, Korean immigrants are inclined to claim their ethnic identity as their primary identity and are capable of considering other identities in changing conditions.

4. Assimilation Revisited

Given the features of transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants and the two congregations, then, how can the term assimilation be understood? Traditionally, "assimilation means encouraging immigrants to learn the national language and to fully adopt the social and cultural practices of the receiving community. That involves a transfer of allegiance from the place of birth to the new country and the adoption of a new national identity."²⁰⁰ However, there is so much evidence that Korean immigrants do not follow the same path as the previous immigrants assimilated to the mainstream

²⁰⁰ Stephen Castles, "Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization," 1155.

American society. In contrast to the traditional assumption of immigration as an absolute disconnection from homelands, for current Korean immigrants, it is generally a matter of choice and ability to stay connected with two or more countries. In particular, given the strong tendency of Korean immigrants' transnational engagements, the adoption of a transnational viewpoint will give new thoughts and insights on the understandings of migration, nation-states, identity, and assimilation. In this aspect, I will reexamine how Korean immigrants assimilate to American society while maintaining their ethnic heritage via transnational religious activities.

Due to the development of technology and global networks, Korean immigrants are easily updated with all the details of occurrences in their homeland. Moreover, the heavy flows of capital, labor, and ideas help the increasing number of Korean immigrants better understand both their traditional culture and Western culture. In fact, Korean immigrants are already exposed to some aspects of American culture and economic and political systems. Such systems as capitalistic market system, democratic government, and consumerism disperse to all corners of the earth along with the effects of globalization in which the United States takes the leadership. For current Korean immigrants, therefore, keeping ethnic culture and learning American culture at the same time are not really mutually exclusive. In this situation, the notion of assimilation as drifting apart from the original cultural practices becomes meaningless and requires a revision to reflect the changing world order and the modes of migration of Korean immigrants.

When rethinking assimilation from a transnational perspective, it is also important to consider the role of religion and religious organizations in the lives of Korean immigrants. Though less recognized in the existing studies of migration and

transnationalism, the religious beliefs and practices of Korean immigrants heavily affect their thoughts, behaviors, and decisions in matters of assimilation and ethnic retention. Religion is even more important for Korean immigrants, who have traditionally different religions, to settle into and live everyday lives in American society where Christian morality and teachings are intricately embedded.

Given the multiple religious ties of current immigrants to their homelands, many scholars endeavor to present alternative ideas to the conventional concept of assimilation. One of the ideas insists that transnational activities should be considered as an alternative way to assimilation. In his study on the transnational religious networks of Fuzhounese immigrants, Kenneth J. Guest finds that they use “their emerging transnational religious networks to articulate an alternative existence and identity in the face of the homogenizing influences of global capitalism and the U.S. labor market.”²⁰¹ For Fuzhounese immigrants in the United States, according to Guest, it is transnational connections that “serve as an alternative to immigrant incorporation in the host society.”²⁰² That is, it is believed that immigrants choose either transnational religious connections or assimilation.

Different from the study of Guest, Portes suggests another opinion about the relationship between transnational connections and assimilation. He argues, “This cosmopolitan outlook has made immigrant adaptation and increasing participation much less confrontational. In such a context, transnationalism is able to play a more integrative

²⁰¹ Kenneth J. Guest, “Religion and Transnational Migration in the New Chinatown,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard et al. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), 161.

²⁰² Ibid.

role, protecting immigrants in the earlier stages of adaptation and devolving gradually into entry and participation into the host country mainstream.”²⁰³ From his perspective, transnational activities are considered a buffer to the psychological and cultural shocks of immigrants and assistance to the gradual assimilation to the host society. In other words, he understands transnational activities as a subset of assimilation.

Then, in the lives of Korean immigrants, are transnational religious activities and assimilation vying with each other for more power among the new immigrants? Or do transnational activities diminish as the degree of assimilation increases? My finding is different from both studies. In contrast to the typical views on the transnational connections and assimilation as a zero-sum game, in my study, it is obvious that these phenomena coincidentally occur, complementing each other. They can go together in different levels of involvement. This is another position to the theories of transnational connections and assimilation either as two competitive entities or as the subset of a whole. “During the 1990s, transnational migration scholars added a third perspective....They argued that some migrants continued to be active in their homelands at the same time that they became part of the countries that received them.”²⁰⁴ That is, a third perspective advocates the coincidence of these allegedly incompatible phenomena of transnational connections and assimilation. Based upon my study of Korean immigrants and their churches, I found that this third perspective well reflects the transnational religious activities and assimilation of Korean immigrants. For Korean immigrants, transnational

²⁰³ Alejandro Portes, “Conclusion: Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Volume 22 no. 2 (1999): 473.

²⁰⁴ Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 130.

religious connections are not antithetical to assimilation. Rather, they are interconnected in the everyday lives of Korean immigrants.

If transnational religious activities and assimilation are not exclusive, then, how can be the meaning of assimilation reestablished through the lens of transnational religious connections? In this study, I will suggest three possible answers: assimilation as mutual change, assimilation as eclecticism, and assimilation as boundary reduction.

1) Assimilation as Mutual Change

Traditionally, many Americans believe that immigrants should follow American ways of life as they enter into this nation. In this understanding, immigrants are depicted as inferior to the majority of American society, and thus need to abandon their ethnic culture and conform to American culture. Moreover, this concept seldom grants newcomers autonomy to decide whether, what, and how to learn about the host society. It considers white Americans as protagonists in the making and remaking of America, seeing immigrants as the mere passive recipients of the social structure and cultural traditions of America. Although immigrants have immensely contributed to the wider society, they are rarely appreciated by the majority of America. Given this situation when mainstream America unilaterally imposes burdens of assimilation on the new immigrants, now, it is necessary to rethink assimilation as a reciprocal process in which immigrants and the host society work together for the formation of American society.

Though very little recognized, assimilation has always been a mutual process. The influx of immigrants always has an impact upon the host society while immigrants learn the language, behavior, and culture of a new society. In a societal level, the presence of

newcomers prompts the discussions of and changes in border controls, federal and state laws, and public education systems. A trifling aspect such as bringing in a foreign language vocabulary or a spice for an ethnic dish also adds diversity to American society. In any case, immigrants and the wider community are widely cross-fertilized by confronting each other. In fact, immigration never remains an isolated act of individuals. It is a matter of interaction and exchange among different groups of people, goods, services, ideas, and programs.

This mutuality of assimilation is also applied to the religious beliefs and practices of immigrants and the host society. According to Elta Smith and Courtney Bender, “while previous immigrant religious groups drew upon dominant American organizational forms, they also developed (or imported) religious meaning, practice, and perspectives that altered the American religious landscape in both subtle and profound ways.”²⁰⁵ It is obvious that some traditionally non-congregational religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism adopts the American meaning of congregationalism to satisfy the unique needs of their religious followers in America. They build their own gathering places in the middle of ethnic niches and offer organized worship services for immigrant believers. At the same time, their religious symbols and ideas permeate the whole American society, though superficial in many cases. The statues of Buddha and Hindu goddesses even appear in irrelevant places such as shopping centers and restaurants. Meditation centers mushroom in the alleys of big cities of America. In addition, the inflow of foreign believers dramatically changes the demographic composition of American religion. For

²⁰⁵ Elta Smith and Courtney Bender, “The Creation of Urban Niche Religion: South Asian Taxi Drivers in New York City,” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, eds. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 79.

example, the resurgence of the Catholic Church, the revival of Pentecostal churches, and the dying mainline churches' transform into ethnic churches all result from the inrush of the new immigrants from the Third World.

The transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants also reinforce this mutual aspect of assimilation. The two Korean congregations where I participated are good illustrations of these transnational activities and assimilation as mutual change. It is Korean immigrants who send and receive religious ideas, programs, and symbols between their homeland and America. It is Korean immigrant churches that attempt to import new programs and materials from their original country. By developing and maintaining multiple ties to Korea and churches in Korea, Korean immigrant churches provide popular trends in Korea for their members. Bible study materials, Christian books, and Christian education programs in Korea are almost simultaneously introduced to Korean immigrant congregations. In big cities such as New York and Los Angeles, there are many daughter churches of Korean mega-churches. They grow very fast under the enormous support of the mother church in terms of personnel, finance, and religious supplies.

The interesting fact is that Korean mega-churches originally emulated certain programs and ideas of American evangelical churches and transformed them to fit to the Korean sentiment. Willow Creek Community church, the Vineyard Movement, and Joel Osteen's books are well-known among Christians in Korea. After being translated and going through the indigenous process to Korean atmosphere, then, American Christian practices transform into Korean-style religious practices. Again flowing into Korean immigrant churches, these Koreanized programs and practices contribute to the revival of

evangelical Christian faith in America. Pastor Kim of Denver Korean Presbyterian church used to preach that American Christians are losing their power in society because they did not invest their time and energy in prayer. Emphasizing the power of prayer, he often asked his congregants to pray aloud altogether (통성기도) with various prayer requests. And he proudly mentioned that one of the conferences of the PCUSA introduced this unique prayer style as the power of Korean Christians.

Given the direct and indirect interactions between American Christianity and Korean immigrant churches, it is clear that assimilation occurs in both ways. Levitt's argument that distinguishes tolerance from acceptance gives an important meaning to think about assimilation in this global world. "Tolerant people acknowledge difference. They are willing to live side by side with people who are not like them, but are unwilling to be changed by them. Pluralists believe that no single religion has absolute authority over a single religious truth. They are willing to engage with and be changed by others, creating something new along the way."²⁰⁶ This reciprocal character of assimilation, though seldom appreciated, is strengthened along with the transnational activities of immigrants. That is, both the majority Americans and immigrants, including Korean immigrants, are the warp and woof of society to make and remake the religious fabric of America.

2) Assimilation as Eclecticism

Transnational religious connections make the degree and type of assimilation more eclectic and complex. In my study, the roles and features of Korean immigrant churches

²⁰⁶ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 12.

clearly show that Korean immigrants seldom follow a straightforward model of assimilation. Instead, they reflect the multiple ways of establishing a sense of belonging and value system, negotiating with various issues of American society such as race and ethnicity, economy, and political propensity. In this sense, Korean immigrant churches are neither simply Korean nor American nor Christian. They mix and combine some aspects of each part whenever they need to do. They are the special mixture of Korean religious sentiments, American social systems, and Christian teachings. Thus, assimilation is rather the process of negotiation in which Korean immigrants find eclectic ways of living in a foreign land.

This is consistent with the religious change of many Latinos from Catholicism to evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity. According to Allan Figueroa Deck, S. J., there are affinities between the popular religiosity of Latinos and evangelical teachings. As to the Latino popular religiosity, he explains that “[i]ts main qualities are a concern for an immediate experience of God, a strong orientation toward the transcendent, an implicit belief in miracles, a practical orientation toward healing, and a tendency to personalize or individualize one’s relationship with the divine.”²⁰⁷ Because evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity satisfies the religious needs of Latinos with its similarities to Latino popular religiosity, the growing numbers of Latinos convert to this religious tradition after their migration to the United States.

Like the Latinos who convert to evangelical Christianity, some Korean immigrants, who have been affected by shamanistic tradition in terms of emphasis on blessing

²⁰⁷ Allan Deck, “The Challenges of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism,” in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, eds. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, S. J. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 422.

(기복신앙), become Christians in a belief that Christian faith would guarantee material prosperity in a foreign nation. In the sudden experience of uprootedness, the evangelical teachings such as a personal relationship with God, the importance of hard work, and God's blessing on the chosen people often provide Korean immigrants with an impetus to pursue their new purposes of life. In particular, because the image of Christianity has been intermingled with modernization and Americanization since its earlier mission to Korea, for Korean immigrants, becoming a Christian implies more than becoming a religious person. It also means to be a part of contemporary American culture.

This eclectic character is becoming accelerated with emerging transnational connections of current Korean immigrants. The interconnectedness of persons, goods, services, and ideas are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of Korean immigrants. Thus, for Korean immigrants, the process of assimilation seldom implies a simple and unilateral emulation of the mainstream American culture. In this situation, assimilation itself cannot remain a fixed and permanent phenomenon. J. Milton Yinger indicates the dynamic and changing quality of assimilation when he asserts that “[a]ssimilation refers to a variable, not an attribute.”²⁰⁸ He goes on to explain:

Much of the disagreement surrounding the study of assimilation is due to the failure to see it as a process and to examine the effects of various degrees. One can describe ‘complete assimilation’ or ‘complete separation,’ but these are rare occurrences within the context of contemporary states. When we treat it as a variable, we see that assimilation can range from the smallest beginnings of interaction and cultural exchange to the thorough fusion of the groups.²⁰⁹

Given the varying degrees and types of assimilation, assimilation cannot be defined as a separate end stage of a long path which all immigrants must follow. Rather, “there have

²⁰⁸ J. Milton Yinger, “Assimilation and Dissimilation,” 176.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

been no single formulas or paths that minority persons have followed, because the permutations of home, host, and intervening variables are too numerous.”²¹⁰ For Korean immigrants, assimilation is in the throes of change because it is constantly negotiating with the different mode of migration and growing transnational activities.

3) Assimilation as Boundary Reduction

The United States is a tacitly segregated society according to race, ethnicity, and class more than it is thought to be. In this type of social structure, it is extremely difficult to cross the boundaries of racial category and social class. Mrs. Park, a member of Denver Korean Presbyterian church, openly talked about her feelings regarding the exclusive social structure of America:

Birds of a feather flock together. When my daughter was young, she had some white friends. But since her high school, I usually heard about her Vietnamese friend, Chinese friend, and Filipino friend. During her college years, she met other second generation Koreans and started to go to a Korean church in New York. Not long ago, I read one newspaper article which said that college students gather together in accordance with their race and ethnicity in campus. There are invisible walls between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in America.

As she shared, it is true that many Korean immigrants are still feeling alienated from the host society and rarely believe that they can cross the boundaries between “us” and “them.”

This social atmosphere of their new country is one of the primary factors that shape the assimilation process of Korean immigrants. The experiences of marginalization and exclusion in American society make Korean immigrants feel unacceptable to mainstream American society. As Linda Basch and her colleagues affirm, “the construction of the

²¹⁰ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 6.

‘American people’ as white has served to justify and perpetuate the subordination of the African-American population as well as to assimilate certain immigrant populations and exclude others.”²¹¹ For Asians including Koreans, since the early days of American history, there have been too many obstructions to be fully Americans. For them, the racial and ethnic identities are not options as they are for white Americans. Rather, these identities are attached to nonwhite immigrants and their descendants as permanent labels as “perpetual foreigners.” Therefore, the experiences of exclusions “have shaped the historical memories and thus the identities of Asian Americans in ways that make assimilation something other than a straightforward merging into the mainstream.”²¹² In this situation, even though the term assimilation often accompanies a normative stance, Korean immigrants in contemporary America cannot help asking an important question not on the responsibility for assimilation but on the possibility of assimilation.

Given the invisible but persistent divisions among different groups of people, for Korean immigrants, assimilation is nothing less than boundary reduction. It implies not merely the reduction of physical boundary but that of the social, cultural, and emotional boundaries between them and the majority of American society. It is like Mr. Chong’s expression of his living in this society.

I know many kind Americans. They are so nice and gentle. Whenever they come to my store, they try to communicate with me about weather, children, or health. I like them. But still, I don’t feel like I am one of them. They are not my group and I cannot be their group. It seems to me that we live in two different worlds.

²¹¹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994), 40.

²¹² Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, eds, *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 101.

As he explained, many Korean immigrants have a hard time to feeling like they belong to the same space of living with the majority of Americans.

Some scholars, such as Alba and Nee, attempt to explain the proof of assimilation in the reduction of residential boundary between whites and immigrants. They argue that “the aim of assimilating into American life is evident in the choice of residence in the more affluent suburban neighborhoods and in the rapid acculturation of the second generation and its high educational attainment.”²¹³ Unlike their arguments, many demographic changes in residential areas still reveal the closed character of white American society. If nonwhites start to move into traditionally white neighborhoods, whites tend to escape from that area and settle into another place. Furthermore, even though the native-citizens of America and immigrants reside in a same area, that fact rarely guarantees the acceptance of newcomers into mainstream America. Therefore, in this meaning of assimilation, boundary must include physical boundary and the social, cultural, and emotional boundaries between the majority of American society and immigrants. The borders and boundaries that are built to protect the rights and privileges of their own members need to be diminished when different groups of people meet and want to establish a harmonious relationship.

If assimilation is to reduce physical, social, cultural, and emotional boundaries between different groups of people, then, how can those who are confined within their boundaries demolish psychological and actual barriers to others? In my study, I realized that a transnational lens helps to build boundary-crossing relationships among different

²¹³ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 205.

groups of people. In fact, the term transnational means activities or connections across borders or boundaries. It gives people a newer sense of belonging that overcomes the limited space of nation-states. It also provides people with a new insight to see multiple layers of interconnections in this global world. A transnational lens truly presents how to understand the complexity, mutuality, and simultaneity of human relationships that span borders and boundaries.

From this transnational perspective, Korean immigrant churches in American can be differently understood. Even though many migration and religious studies have emphasized that the formation of ethnic niches or ethnic organizations reveal the tendency of immigrants to concentrate, it rarely means that immigrants refuse to mix with the native citizens of America. Rather, based upon the experiences of Korean immigrants, the construction of Korean immigrant churches is an action to promote the quality of their lives as well as a reaction from the experiences of discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, and alienation of the host community. In this aspect, I found that ethnic communities and transnational communities are not really different. The general notion of ethnic enclaves emphasizes separateness and exclusivity while transnational communities place a high value on connections, interactions, and exchanges that happen across borders. In fact, however, most ethnic enclaves are not absolutely isolated from the wider society. Instead, they are always open and permeable. While endeavoring to construct safe havens for themselves, seen in my study, ethnic organizations such as Korean immigrant churches diligently build some connections with the host society and the sending country. The transnational lens helps to recognize this less noticeable but

ongoing activities of Korean immigrant churches which reduce boundaries between Korean immigrants and mainstream American society.

Through the lens of transnational activities, the religious assimilation of Korean immigrants can also be explained as boundary reduction. Many church members in my two congregations were not Christians before coming to the United States. One of them, Mrs. Nam shared with me:

I started to attend this church after I came to the United States. About thirty years ago, the fastest way to meet with other Koreans was attending a Korean church. And like my family, through church, Korean immigrants received lots of help to settle into this new place of living. Church members helped me get a driver's license, find an apartment, and know about children's schools. Now, I am helping other newly coming Koreans in this church.

According to R. Stephen Warner, a high percentage of Korean immigrants belong to ethnic churches. "The 70 percent of U.S. Koreans who are church members, and the absolute majority who attend church weekly, represent extraordinarily high proportions."²¹⁴ Although this number is a little overstated based upon the Christian population of Korean immigrants in the Denver area, it is true that more Korean immigrants become Christians after their migration to the United States. Given this fact, it may be questionable whether many Koreans' conversion to Christianity can be considered the major mode of assimilation to the American religious and social environment. If understanding assimilation as boundary reduction, it is obvious that being Christians help new Korean immigrants learn the American ways of living more easily. In this sense, reducing the boundaries between Korean and American systems and

²¹⁴ R. Stephen Warner, "Korean Immigrant Church as Case and Model," in *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*, eds. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 30.

their cultures, Korean immigrant churches assist Korean immigrants to assimilate better to a new society.

Furthermore, transnational religious activities help many Korean immigrants who have experienced downward mobility after the emigration to the United States. The reality in American society is totally different from their American dream. Korean immigrants pose a question of “quality of life” in this land of opportunity. In this hard time of transition and settlement, Korean immigrant churches play an important role in restoring their self-esteem and self-confidence. If assimilation means a boundary reduction, Korean immigrant churches are significant means to diminish the actual and psychological boundaries of Korean immigrants who feel that they are going downhill. In the same aspect, some scholars tend to connect the downward mobility of immigrants to the higher religiosity in the United States. Ho-Youn Kwon et al. argue, “Their marginal occupations, limited social networks, and related socio-psychological problems are factors that push them to seek meaning in their lives through religion.”²¹⁵ The heightened religiosity of Korean immigrants proves their efforts to reduce gaps between their ideal and reality.

It is a well-known fact that Korean immigrant churches are spiritual gatherings as well as community centers. Karen J. Chai deals with the social and practical functions of Korean immigrant congregations as “four categories, all of which would be appealing even to nonbelievers: fellowship, maintenance of cultural tradition, social services, and

²¹⁵ Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds., *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 13.

social status and positions.”²¹⁶ To her argument, I would add a less emphasized function that most Korean immigrant churches develop and maintain transnational religious connections that span both the original nation and host society. The interim pastor, Rev. Kim of Denver Korean Presbyterian church, stressed its intimate relations both with other Korean churches and the PCUSA. While he encouraged church members to pay attention to what is happening in Korean churches, he also mentioned its important position in its denomination:

Korean immigrant churches are the crucial part of American Christian churches. As American mainline churches are losing their members, immigrants such as Koreans are filling the loss. That is why our district of PCUSA pays attention to our church and financially supports us through the turmoil. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. In return, we have to help our denomination revive and thrive in this secular age with our prayer and ample resources.

As he preached, functioning as transnational centers for Korean immigrants, Korean immigrant churches work to reduce boundaries between Korean immigrants and the mainstream American society. They are places where members worship in their language, make friends with co-ethnics, receive social services, and also learn the social and cultural aspects of America.

On the surface, the current condition of Korean immigrant churches is not really different from the time when Martin Luther King Jr. declared that “Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.” Nonetheless, Korean immigrant churches endeavor to bridge the gaps between them and the wider society. Instead of choosing one between either and or, they perform both and much more. From a transnational perspective, providing various types of connection such as missionary work, denominational support,

²¹⁶ Karen J. Chai, “Competing for the Second Generation,” in *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, eds. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 298.

and sister relations with other churches, Korean immigrant churches encourage their members to participate in activities across borders. In this study, I would argue that transnational religious activities are another face of assimilation as reducing boundaries between discrete places.

As discussed above, contrary to the general understanding of transnational activities and assimilation as contradictory and incompatible, by participating in various transnational activities, Korean immigrants actively interact with the host society in ways of mutual change, eclecticism, and boundary reduction. If assimilation shakes off its long standing normative stance that has been imposed upon immigrants' lives, it will explain better the complex lives of immigrants and the multiple layers of relationships among immigrants, the sending country, and the receiving nation.

VI: Conclusion

In contemporary society as the power of globalization increases, interconnections between different people, communities, and nation-states are multilayered. The ways immigrants settle down in a new country are also diversifying from the traditional picture of one-time migration from their original nations to destination countries. Accordingly, “Under conditions of globalization, certain new types of migration are emerging, or older types are becoming more significant.”²¹⁷ This is also true for the case of Korean immigrants in the United States. In general, the total number of Korean immigrants to America has decreased for the last several years.²¹⁸ Yet, regardless of the numerical change, it is important to notice that the types of immigration and settlement are changing according to different sociopolitical and economic conditions. For example, while the number of Korean immigrants who are hired by American enterprises or religious organizations is diminished, that of Koreans who immigrate by investing a certain amount of capital into American businesses increases.

Among emerging patterns of Korean immigration to the United States, one specific type demands attention. It is similar to what Stephen Castles names “the astronaut

²¹⁷ Stephen Castles, “Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalization,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 285.

²¹⁸ 미로 가는 한국 이민자수 감소, 코리아나 뉴스 <http://okmedia.or.kr/news.php?code=&mode=view&num=31040> (assessed 17 May 2011).

phenomenon in which whole families move to countries like Australia and Canada for reasons of security or lifestyle, while the breadwinner returns to the country of origin for work, commuting back and forth across long distances.”²¹⁹ In Korean language, it is called *kirogi* families. The following story is extracted from a newspaper article about the emerging phenomenon of *kirogi* families in Korea:

Education has brought Hannah to this classroom and to a white frame townhouse in Ellicott City. But the price of her American education -- and her escape from the relentlessly competitive Korean school system -- is a fractured family. Hannah's mother, Jungwon Kim, and two younger siblings are here with her. Her father, Keeyeop Kim, an executive in South Korea, stayed behind to finance his family's life abroad. They have lived this way -- children without a father, wife without a husband -- for a year. Their plan is to live this way for nine more years. The Koreans call them *kirogi*, or wild geese. The birds, a traditional symbol at weddings, mate for life. And they travel great distances to bring back food for their young.²²⁰

Although the Korean government does not disclose the exact figure of total *kirogi* families, it is obvious that this new phenomenon has a serious effect on the traditional structure of family, national economy, and the education system of Korea. Furthermore, its influence upon American society is no way negligible because of its constant and frequent transnational activities.

Another novel type of Korean immigration is retirement migration to Korea.

“Retirement migration is an emerging type of mobility closely linked to improvements in transport and communications. Increasing numbers of people from rich countries with relatively high living costs and unattractive climates are seeking to spend their twilight

²¹⁹ Stephen Castles, 285.

²²⁰ Phuong Ly, “A Wrenching Choice,” *Washington Post* Sunday January 9, 2005; Page A01, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A59355-2005Jan8?language=printer> (assessed 16 Apr, 2011).

years in more congenial surroundings.”²²¹ In addition, the elderly Korean immigrants, who spent their younger days sacrificing for their family members in a foreign nation, have a mind to return to their homelands for the later days of life. In Korea, there is a recently developed village named “German Town” (독일마을) into which Korean Germans resettle after their retirement in Germany. During the 1960s and 1970s, many Korean people migrated to Germany to work as miners and nurses. After spending thirty or forty years in a foreign land, these first generation Korean Germans get a favorable offer to return by a local government of Korea. Since the year of 2003, therefore, German style constructions started to appear in a government-aided town of the southern coast of Korea. Some individuals and religious organizations also promote similar plans of building “America town” and “France town” to attract those who consider retirement migration to Korea. This new idea is feasible through various transnational connections that span national borders.

The above illustrations clearly reveal the changing notions of migration and citizenship. Contrary to the previous understanding of migration as permanent leaving of homelands, current immigrants have more options to choose where and how to live across the borders of nation-states. Furthermore, many nation-states enact new laws and rules on border controls and the legal status of overseas citizens to fit to the variations of world conditions. The Korean government also legislates a new law regarding citizenship, which allows overseas Koreans to keep their multiple citizenships in case of meeting legal requirements. Given these, in this global world, it is evident that the term migration no longer implies a complete disconnection from the sending nation and a full

²²¹ Stephen Castles, 286.

assimilation to the receiving society. Instead, immigrants can keep multiple ties to their homelands while learning a new society's rules and norms. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the lives of contemporary immigrants from a transnational perspective.

As seen in my study, the appearance of different types of immigration among Koreans primarily originates in the unprecedented development of transnational connections along with better technology, transportation, and global networks. Developing and maintaining constant transnational activities, some Korean immigrants like the kirogi families can live in transnational spaces. Owing to the updated information and programs that span borders, some Korean immigrants can decide to return to their homeland after their retirement. Based upon the fact that more and more Korean immigrants are exposed to the recent affairs of Korea through transnational activities, I could conclude that current Korean immigrants live in-between and in-connection. Transnational activities help Korean immigrants reduce the traumas of migration, transition, and settlement, and learn useful ways to survive and thrive in a new place of living.

One of the important transnational connections that Korean immigrants sustain is religious practices. Because religion is often considered the private sphere of life that seems to be unsuitable for academic and public dialogues, transnational religious activities are much less studied than other aspects such as political, economic, and social transnational activities. However, they are very important for many Korean immigrants who experience psychological and spiritual instability after migration. Consequently, to satisfy the unique needs and concerns of Korean immigrants who seek safe havens in a new environment, Korean immigrant congregations play an important role, developing

various transnational activities. As the two case study church revealed, they diligently provide their members with the necessary goods, ideas, programs, and symbols from their homelands. They also offer worship services in their ethnic language, intimate relationships with co-ethnics, and the celebrative events of cultural heritage.

Given the fact that many Korean immigrants and their congregations are transnationally engaged, at this time, I believe that it is timely and appropriate to reexamine the meaning of assimilation in rapidly changing contexts. Do the new immigrants assimilate to the mainstream American society as the earlier immigrants did? Is the term assimilation useful and meaningful to properly understand current immigrants? More fundamentally, is assimilation still viable in contemporary global society? To rethink the proper meaning of assimilation for the present time, it is important to adopt a transnational perspective because most new immigrants are transmigrants as some scholars call. From this perspective, assimilation can be understood in wholly different meanings.

In fact, the traditional meaning of assimilation has forced newcomers to entirely submit to the mainstream American society. It was the inevitable responsibility of immigrants as a one-way process. This conventional notion of assimilation is closely related to the issue of power. In terms of power relations, the term assimilation generally implies a permanent disparity in power retention. According to Fumitaka Matsuoka, “[native citizens’] goal was the homogeneity of all people. This meant that the very cohesiveness of American society depended upon the assimilation of diverse groups of people into this particular idea of homogeneity developed by the particular cultural and

ethnic group occupying the dominant role in society.”²²² Imposing the duty of assimilation to every aspect of American life upon immigrants, the native population of America attempts to suppress immigrants’ possession of power in America. In other words, the majority people of America adopt assimilation as a means of controlling immigrants. Thus, they tend to guard against those who maintain constant and frequent transnational activities, believing that transnational connections interrupt the allegedly unavoidable process of assimilation.

Then, does keeping transnational connection retard the assimilation of newcomers? Are transnational activities and assimilation competing with each other in the lives of the new immigrants? Many people will answer positively to these questions. Based upon the transnational religious activities of Korean immigrants, however, I found that the process of assimilation is not incompatible with maintaining multiple ties to the original country. This is similar to the study of Levitt et al. In contemporary society, “host-country incorporation and transnational practices can occur simultaneously. Migrants configure packages of livelihood strategies, piercing together opportunities in their sending and receiving countries to reap the greatest rewards.”²²³ As they assert, immigrants always search for more favorable ways to survive and successively take up their residence in an unfamiliar community. For this purpose, “transnational aspects help

²²² Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995), 17.

²²³ Peggy Levitt, Josh DeWind, and Steven Vertovec, “International Perspectives on Transnational Migration: An Introduction,” *International Migration Review* Volume 37 no. 3 (2003), 571.

transmigrants to juggle various demands.”²²⁴ In contrast to the general idea on the relationship between transnational connections and assimilation as contradictory, as the two church members showed, current Korean immigrants involve both. Furthermore, different from a portrait of some immigrants described as forming ethnic enclaves without contacting the host society, immigrants “inevitably adjust and adapt to their new environments. Few immigrant groups seek to create a communal bubble that isolates them entirely from the impact of the host society.”²²⁵ It is obvious that the new immigrants come to contact with the surrounding society while they keep certain types of transnational activities.

To use transnational ties in more beneficial ways, Korean immigrants in my study actively participate in the process of negotiating and recreating what they receive in a new environment. From a religious aspect, they attempt to reformulate their beliefs and practices to be pertinent in American contexts. Thus, their faith brought from Korea comes to produce distinctive fruits in an American soil. The worship services and other religious activities of Korean immigrant congregations are the unique outcomes of negotiation and recreation. In addition, Korean immigrants use transnational connections in a selective way. They always choose and select among many different options to get the most benefits from connections that span borders and boundaries. Instead of passively admitting what is given to them, Korean immigrants decide what will be the

²²⁴ Thomas Faist, “Developing Transnational Social Spaces: The Turkish-German Example” in *Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, ed. Ludger Pries (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 61.

²²⁵ Peter Kivisto, “Social Spaces, Transnational Immigrant Communities, and the Politics of Incorporation,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 309.

best selection. Furthermore, Korean immigrants tend to combine different elements from multiple transnational sources. Thus, the utility of transnational connections of Korean immigrants contributes to the production of more embodied religious beliefs and practices in America.

Considering these characteristics of Korean immigrants' transnational activities in terms of negotiation, selection, and combination, my study clearly shows that transnational activities and assimilation can simultaneously occur. "At first glance, the rise in transnational activism among today's immigrants and the numerous programs of sending-country governments aimed at strengthening it appear to undermine the process of assimilation and retard the integration of immigrants into the American body politic."²²⁶ Nonetheless, from a transnational perspective, "past debates about whether immigrant organizations retard assimilation or promote incorporation are rendered meaningless."²²⁷ These two seemingly contradictory phenomena complement each other rather than compete to get more attention from immigrants. Indeed, they are not a zero-sum game.

Then, if effective transnational strategies enable immigrants to constantly access their homelands and assimilate to multiple social settings at the same time, how can the process of assimilation be understood in more appropriate ways? Above all, it is important to recognize that assimilation is not a one-way process but always a mutual action. Though less acknowledged, this mutuality of assimilation is reinforced by various

²²⁶ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 137.

²²⁷ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994), 248.

transnational connections of immigrants. Interacting with transnational activities, immigrants and the host society contribute together to the formation and reformation of American society. In addition, transnational activities add complex and eclectic features to assimilation. Instead of being an end point of a destined process that all immigrants follow, assimilation from a transnational perspective includes varied and multiple stages of immigrants' learning a new society. It is like a spectrum in which diverse colors exist together in dimly drawn borders. Another important understanding of assimilation lies in its position as reducing boundaries among different people and societies. In American society where racial and ethnic categories are still alive, it is crucial to understand assimilation as the reduction of physical, social, cultural, and emotional boundaries between mainstream America and immigrants. A transnational perspective becomes the lens to see the actual building of relations when different people meet. In other words, transnationally engaged, immigrants, the sending country, and the receiving country all assimilate to each other, reducing boundaries among them.

If transnational activities play an important role in Korean immigrants' lives and provide assimilation with new insights, will these connections have an enduring impact upon Korean immigrants and their children? Will transnational involvement be reproduced in the subsequent generations? Are transnational activities limited to the first generation Koreans? In this study, the answers to these questions are not clear yet because of the relatively short history of Korean immigration to the United States. More than two thirds of Koreans in American territory are still immigrants and most of their children are too young for further investigation. Barkan anticipates the gradual demise of transnational activities as assimilation to American society increases. He contends that

“among most newcomers these actions have been limited, frequently fading over time as the immigrants put roots down in America. They are scarcely being carried over to the second generation, although some evidence of that is now being assembled.”²²⁸ It is true that not all Korean immigrants engage in transnational activities in similar intensities. Nonetheless, it is too hasty to expect the decrease of transnational connections among second generation Koreans. Given the unexpected level of interconnections in the world, it is rather important to pay attention to the growing transnational activities of immigrants and their implications for several societies.

Rumbaut argues that “[l]ike conquest and enslavement, immigration is a transforming force, producing profound and unanticipated social changes in both sending and receiving societies, in intergroup relations within receiving societies, and among the immigrants themselves and their descendants.”²²⁹ As he states, immigration is not only a matter of individual decision on the place of living. It has a great influence on the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious aspects of the sending country and the receiving nation. As I found in my study, through multiple transnational connections, current immigration generates the novel types of migration, transition, and settlement distinguished from the previous waves of immigration. It is not easy to expect how the everyday life of immigrants will change under the conditions of globalization. Yet, it is important to endeavor to rethink what was long taken for granted according to changing contexts. To build better relations between newcomers and the host society in this mobile

²²⁸ Elliott R. Barkan, ed., *Immigration, Incorporation & Transnationalism* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 8.

²²⁹ Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Melting and the Pot: Assimilation and Variety in American Life,” in *Incorporating Diversity: Rethinking Assimilation in a Multicultural Age* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 157.

world, my study challenges to reexamine assimilation from a transnational perspective.

The term assimilation will be truly understood in new thoughts and insights. In fact, the traditional meaning of assimilation is already collapsed even though many still stick to the remains of the old structure.

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